Power and Politics in Venezuelan Higher Education Reform, 1999-2012

by

Elliot Johann Storm

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Political Science
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation explains why Venezuelan state and government elites were able to successfully design, adopt, and implement some higher education reforms but not others during the presidencies of Hugo Chávez (1999-2012). Conceptualizing universities as political institutions that occupy a liminal position within the borderlands of state and society, and using an approach that emphasizes the relational and procedural nature of political change, I compare four higher education initiatives advanced by Venezuelan reformers: a series of universalization programs, the 2001 Organic Education Law, the 2009 Organic Education Law, and the 2010 University Education Law. My analysis reveals that the adoption and implementation of these initiatives primarily depended upon how the distribution of institutional autonomy and capacity between the state and the oppositional university sector conditioned the strategic choices of key actors. In the case of universalization reform, actors within the executive branch were enabled by considerable autonomy relative to oppositional forces in the agenda-setting, design, and adoption stages of reform, while material capacity facilitated the implementation process. In the legislative arena, reformers relied upon similar institutional autonomy to set the agenda and design the three bills, but the constitutional guarantee of university autonomy and an increasingly deft use of intra- and inter-institutional connective structures (including governing councils, faculty unions,
and student organizations) allowed the oppositional universities to form a cohesive bloc that constrained reformers and prevented the full implementation of any new legislation. This dissertation therefore challenges accounts of the Venezuelan state as exceptionally strong, provides a detailed account of extra-parliamentary opposition to the Chávez government, and foregrounds the university as an important but significantly understudied political actor in the context of state-society relations.
“Long live the state, by whoever it’s made”
Leonard Cohen, “A Singer Must Die"
Acknowledgements

I arrived at the topic of this dissertation in large part as a way to clarify my own thought regarding questions about power, justice, and the role of the state in social transformation. While no closer to having the answers now than when I began, I am grateful to the many people and organizations that allowed me to indulge this venture.

Financial support from the Ontario government, the School of Graduate Studies, the Department of Political Science, and my parents allowed me to conduct fieldwork in Venezuela. My foremost gratitude is to those Venezuelans that welcomed me into their homes, offices, and study spaces to discuss the politics of higher education reform. In Caracas, Nelson Agelvis and Sara Kafrouni provided hospitality, security and incomparable local knowledge for the entirety of my stay. Alexandra Panzarelli went well out of her way to assist the acculturation and research process as soon as I landed. Yesman Utrera served as an intrepid cultural guide and interpreter whose ability to finesse various bureaucracies proved critical to my data collection. I thank Andy Rosati and Jared Abbott for their companionship as roommates and friends during my stay, and for facilitating this Canadian’s first ever celebration of the Fourth of July in, of all places, Hugo Chávez's Venezuela.

From the first stages of this project to its conclusion, I had the good fortune to be counselled by a group of ideal readers and constructive critics. At my defense, Kent Eaton and Antoinette Handley pushed me to think further about the nuances of how power works across different institutional contexts. I was also privileged to have a dissertation committee that consistently assisted me in ways both big and small. Ruth Hayhoe graciously invited me into an important interdisciplinary community at the Ontario Institution for Studies in Education, which helped me sharpen my thought about the portions of this thesis related specifically to higher education. Ed
Schatz prompted me to think more carefully about state strength and weakness, collective action, and the boundaries between state and society. I thank Ed too for assisting with several essential but decidedly unglamorous administrative tasks that ensured my movement through the program, often on short notice. I am most indebted to my supervisor, Ana Maria Bejarano, whose encouragement to write was just as important as her injunctions to stop and move on. It is a testament to her great patience, generosity, and humour that without exception I always looked forward to our discussions about this project. I truly could not have had a better guide.

Beyond my committee, I benefitted from many intellectual exchanges with a variety of individuals from Latin American Studies and the Latin American Political Science Student Association at the University of Toronto, the comparative higher education thesis group at OISE, especially Grace Karram Stephenson, and fellow panelists at Canadian Political Science Association and Canadian Association for Latin American and Caribbean Studies conferences. A version of Chapter 4 appears as "Brokerage, Political Opportunity, and Protest in Venezuelan Higher Education Reform" in *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2015): 17-26.

Friends and family of all ages and several species have provided important support over the years, not only in terms of the narrow scope of this dissertation but in all of the living that happened alongside it. I would particularly like to thank the Selak family for the simultaneously rejuvenating and exhausting playtime, and Shelly Ghai Bajaj, who since our first white-knuckled days on the UTM shuttle bus has been a sounding board for many ideas and a great friend throughout the duration of the program. I am also grateful to my colleagues and friends at the Teaching Assistants’ Training Program at the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation, whose thoughtfulness and passion for pedagogy enriched the ways that I teach, think, and write.
about politics and education. Finally, I must acknowledge the role of the 2015 CUPE 3902 strike in reminding me of what is at ethical stake in conflicts over academic integrity, equity, and respect for different types of labour within university communities. Although this was an enormously frustrating experience, the clarity it gave me as I began a critical stage of revisions was such that, to quote Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (2003 [1929]), “it was as if in a house long dim a match had been struck, showing ghastly shapes where had been only blurred shadows” (p. 91).

For the last twelve years I have had the privilege and the pleasure of sharing my life with Miriam Novick. I could not have made it through graduate school without her sanctuary, and would not have completed this dissertation without the benefit of her impeccable sense of critique. With this work now complete, I hereby solemnly promise not to pick any more fights about democracy when I suffer from writer's block.

I dedicate this to my sister, who I must grudgingly admit turned out not to be that bad after all, and to my parents, my most important teachers.
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List of Abbreviations

State organizations
FONDEN  Fondo Nacional para el Desarrollo Nacional (National Development Fund)
FONDESPA  Fondo para el Desarrollo Económico y Social del Pais (Social Development Fund)
MECD  Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport)
MES  Ministerio de Educación Superior (Ministry of Higher Education)
MEU  Ministerio de Educación Universitaria (Ministry of University Education)
MPPEU  Ministerio del Poder Popular para Educación Universitaria (Ministry of Popular Power for University Education)
ONAPRE  Oficina Nacional de Presupuesto (National Budget Office)
PDVSA  Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (Petroleum of Venezuela)
TSJ  Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (Supreme Tribunal of Justice)

Universities
LUZ  Universidad de Zulia (Zulia University)
UBV  Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela (Bolivarian University of Venezuela)
UC  Universidad de Carabobo (Carabobo University)
UCAB  Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Andrés Bello Catholic University)
UCV  Universidad Central de Venezuela (Central University of Venezuela)
UDO  Universidad de Oriente (Eastern University)
ULA  Universidad de Los Andes (University of the Andes)
UNEXPO  Universidad Nacional Experimental Politécnica (National Experimental Polytechnic University)
UPEL  Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador (Liberator Polytechnic Experimental University)
USB  Universidad Simón Bolívar (Simón Bolivar University)

Higher education governance bodies and membership organizations
APUFAT  Sindicato Nacional Asociación de Profesionales Universitarios en Funciones Administrativas y Técnicas (National Union of University Technical and Administrative Employees)
ARBOL  Asociación de Rectors Bolivarianos (Association of Bolivarian Rectors)
AVERU  Asociación Venezolana de Rectors Universitarios (Venezuelan Association of University Rectors)
CU  Consejo Universitario (University Council)
CNU  Consejo Nacional de Universidades (National Universities Council)
FAPUV  Federación de Asociaciones de Profesores Universitarios de Venezuela (Federation of Venezuelan University Professors)
FCU  Federación de Centros Universitarios (Federation of University Centres)
OPSU  Oficina de Planificación del Sector Universitario (University Sector Planning Office)
<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Acción Democrática (Democratic Action)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPEI</td>
<td>Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee)</td>
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<td>MBR-200</td>
<td>Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200)</td>
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<td>MIR</td>
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<td>MUD</td>
<td>Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (Democratic Unity Roundtable)</td>
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<td>MVR</td>
<td>Movimiento V República (Fifth Republic Movement)</td>
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<td>PCV</td>
<td>Partido Comunista de Venezuela (Communist Party of Venezuela)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PJ</td>
<td>Primero Justicia (Justice First)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>Patria Para Todos (Fatherland for All)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSUV</td>
<td>Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNT</td>
<td>Un Nuevo Tiempo (A New Era)</td>
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<td>VP</td>
<td>Voluntad Popular (Popular Will)</td>
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Glossary

**Autonomous universities** claim organizational, administrative, financial and academic independence from the state, although they are fully publicly funded. They hold internal elections for executive authorities (rectors, vice-rectors, secretaries and lesser authorities such as faculty deans) and governing councils, determine curricular structure and content, and have jurisdiction over issues such as tenure and research initiatives.

**Auxiliary programs** consist of a range of educational programs that may operate outside of universities and may not result in a degree or accreditation. These include the Bolivarian Missions and ‘university villages.’

**Experimental universities** are publicly funded institutions that lack administrative, organizational, academic or financial autonomy. The Ministry of University Education makes most decisions. By law these institutions have the potential to become autonomous, and while some have begun the process by holding internal elections, none have gained full autonomy in relation to the state.

**The National Universities Council** (CNU) is the highest governing body of the university sector. It is presided over by the Minister of Higher Education and includes the rectors of each Venezuelan university as well as several other representatives from the university community.

**The Office of University Sector Planning** (OPSU) is the technical body of the National Universities Council. The director of OPSU is selected by the Minister of Higher Education.

**Private universities** are those primarily funded by non-state sources including tuition fees, donations, endowments and partnerships with private industry. They can be religious or secular.

**University technical institutes** (IUTs) and **university colleges** are vocational institutes that emphasize skills-based education and training.
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<td>Hugo Chávez elected president</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Chávez inaugurated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April</td>
<td>First Enabling Act passed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
<td>New constitution promulgated</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>MVR wins presidential, parliamentary, state and municipal elections</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>November</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td></td>
<td>July</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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Introduction

Higher Education, Universities, and the Bolivarian Revolution

On a sunny morning in June 2012, several dozen maintenance workers from the Central University of Venezuela shut off the electricity and locked the doors to the Rectorate at the university’s campus in downtown Caracas, preventing anyone inside from leaving. Upset about being required to pay in advance for new uniforms, and passing out flyers about a host of other accumulated grievances, the protesters first milled around outside, then started chanting, and finally began to throw firecrackers and small smoke bombs into the front enclosure. This continued for approximately two hours, with dozens of staff and visitors tentatively moving down the building stairwell and then rushing back up when a new firecracker or smoke bomb was thrown in, until three women employed as administrative staff within the rectors’ offices marched to the barricaded doors, pushed past the security guards inside, and demanded to be let out: it was lunchtime, and they did not want to spend their hour stuck inside. Initially rebuffed and consequently becoming more annoyed, the three women became increasingly insistent, and finally, with the simple turn of a key by the man evidently in charge of the protest, the women — and the rest of us, perhaps less hungry and certainly less bold — were able to exit the building.

This incident was, all things considered, relatively banal: no one was hurt, there was no property damage, and the entire event began and ended within only a few hours. The protest is also instructive. On the surface, the disruption at the Rectorate concerned a minor disagreement between workers¹ and university authorities. In actuality, the incident was a manifestation of a much larger struggle that characterized Venezuelan state-university relations during the presidency of Hugo Chávez (1999-2013). The core of this conflict revolved around the project of

¹ Throughout this dissertation I use the term ‘workers’ to refer to employees that undertake a range of tasks largely related to the physical infrastructure, maintenance, or movement across university grounds. Such positions include landscapers, custodians, security personnel, and transportation personnel.
'university transformation,' a key part of the government’s larger plan to turn Venezuela into a participatory democracy within the framework of ‘twenty-first century socialism.’ Reformers argued that the creation of new higher education programs and institutions that benefitted the urban poor meant that many more Venezuelans would be able to access university education and attain post-secondary degrees, relieving some of the social debt accumulated by previous governments. Likewise, state and government elites maintained that the expansion of state influence in the organizational, administrative, and academic affairs of Venezuela’s autonomous universities would lead to more transparency and efficiency in these public institutions. These elites, and their many supporters, argued that the combination of bureaucratic and legislative reform was a just and necessary response to enduring educational inequality and a proactive method to assist Venezuela in its democratic transition to socialism.

Critics, on the other hand, including opposition parties, university professors, students, various civil society organizations, and, occasionally, supporters of the government itself, argued that these reform initiatives were nothing more than sustained attempts to hollow out independent centres of critical thinking, prevent universities from mobilizing against the Chávez government, and progressively concentrate power in the executive branch. The reduction of university autonomy, the promotion of socialist knowledge production, and the restriction of public funding were seen as anathema to the purpose of university education and the mission of

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2 In 2005, Chávez began to make references to a “socialism of the twenty-first century,” explaining that it is not “about statism or state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the Soviet Union,” but as a “humanist” socialism “based in solidarity, in fraternity, in love, in justice, in liberty and in equality” (Wilpert, 2007, p. 238). Twenty-first century socialism remained something of an enigma, however, never officially defined or codified yet still became institutionalized in the state apparatus and formed the discursive parameters within which most Venezuelan political actors operated.

3 Venezuela has three types of universities: autonomous, experimental, and private. Autonomous and experimental universities are both public institutions. In autonomous universities, students and professors elect the rectors, deans, and governing councils according to self-determined electoral frameworks. In experimental universities, the Ministry of Higher Education directly appoints university authorities. This distinction can be referred to in the Glossary, and is addressed in depth later in the dissertation.
the university itself. Reformers were not truly interested in what was best for the Venezuelan higher education system, these opponents maintained, but were instead fixated on ensuring the universities' acquiescence to a rapacious state. What the government explicitly framed as a time of 'university transformation,' many within the university community viewed instead as a period of 'university crisis.'

The Emergence of a “Magical State,” the Decline of an “Exceptional Democracy,” and the Rise of “Twenty-First Century Socialism”

Tensions over the parameters of Venezuelan higher education reform are not unique to the Chávez period or even to the era of Venezuelan democracy. For much of the twentieth century scholars and policymakers viewed Venezuela as a wealthy, capable state due to its status as major a oil producer, and since 1958, a stable liberal democracy. Anchored by a political pact between two ideologically similar, multi-class and highly institutionalized parties, Acción Democrática (Democratic Action) and COPEI (Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee, or the Social Christian Party), the Punto Fijo system (puntofijismo) ensured elite compromise and dedication to robust national democratic institutions designed to "avoid conflict and antagonism, encourage conciliation, and negate the polarization of Venezuelan society along class lines" (Cannon, 2009, p. 34). Political and administrative power was centralized and concentrated in an executive branch that was "dominated by a small circle of party leaders and the president” (Grindle, 2000, p. 1), which gave the state significant control over the national oil industry, particularly with the creation of the national oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), in 1976. The government’s ideological commitment to “sowing the oil” — prioritizing investment in infrastructure and human development — facilitated significant
increases in social spending, especially after international oil prices spiked in 1973 (Manzano, 2014, p. 64), and generated strong popular legitimacy for the regime.

This combination of long-term political stability and stunning economic growth caused many observers to laud Venezuela as a model for would-be Latin American democrats in search of moderate and sustainable representative government in a region otherwise troubled by enduring polarization and, after 1964, brutal authoritarian rule (Levine, 2002, p. 250). Scholars advanced a shared understanding of Venezuela as an "exceptional democracy" based on common perceptions that it "was privileged with respect to the rest of Latin America, that it remained free of acute class and racial conflict and cleavages that threatened political stability elsewhere, and that its democratic system and political culture were healthy and solid" (see Ellner and Tinker Salas, 2007, p. 5). Others were less convinced that the Venezuelan state was quite so powerful, arguing that the growth of the petroleum industry “endowed [the state] with the power to replace reality with fabulous fictions propped up by oil wealth” (Coronil, 1997, p. 2). The production and sale of oil resulted in the rapid accumulation of incredible wealth that, Coronil argued, allowed Venezuelan elites to craft a narrative whereby this "magical state" and its leaders were harbingers of progress and modernity both willing and able to break with a past characterized by political instability and authoritarianism, to create an "illusion that instantaneous modernization lay at hand, that torrents of oil money would change the flow of history and launch the country into the future" (p. 10). This is not to say that oil did not dramatically change Venezuela, or that it had only immaterial effects; of course, petroleum radically transformed the Venezuelan state and its relationship to society. Rather, the "mythification of progress" (p. 5) led to the construction of a national narrative wherein by virtue of its own natural resource wealth elites were able to portray the state as almost invincible, a narrative premised on the notion of
Venezuelan exceptionalism but which masked the long-term political and institutional legacies of decades past and significant structural deficiencies often associated with rentier economies (Karl, 1997; Ross, 2012).

Events in the international political economy soon called into serious question the foundations of the democratic exceptionalism thesis and the ostensible omnipotence of the Venezuelan petro-state. Declining international oil prices, increasing international borrowing costs, and ongoing domestic mismanagement in the late 1970s coalesced to produce a major economic crisis in the 1980s. On February 18, 1983, a day now known as “Black Friday,” the Venezuelan bolívar collapsed, triggering a long period of hyperinflation, capital flight, and economic stagnation (Fernandes, 2010, p. 68). In 1989 former president Carlos Andrés Pérez, who had overseen the boom in social spending during his first administration (1974-1979), was re-elected on an anti-neoliberal platform that he quickly betrayed when he announced a far-reaching austerity program only a few short weeks after his inauguration (Stokes, 2001; Ellner, 2008). Departing from the statist orientation of past administrations, Pérez adopted a structural adjustment plan designed by the International Monetary Fund, cut public spending, passed a Privatization Law that transferred ownership of several state-owned enterprises and social services to the private sector, and pursued a new strategy that in the government’s own words was intended to create a “strong and efficient state that promotes competition and stimulates the expansion and consolidation of a modern market economy” (Fernandes, 2010, p. 70). Pérez also began to oversee significant political decentralization reforms proposed by the Presidential Commission for Reform of the State (COPRE), an organization president Jaime Lusinchi (1984-1989) created in 1984 to address growing dissatisfaction with the political system and ensure elite control of political decentralization (Grindle, 2000, pp. 54-57; Penfold Becerra, 2004, pp.
158-159). The Venezuelan government, in other words, like many across Latin America during this period, embraced political decentralization and the Washington Consensus. The Venezuelan state, for its part, was revealed not as omnipotent, but as profoundly vulnerable.

This economic contraction and subsequent policymaking turnabout had dire political consequences not only for public higher education, which like other sectors felt the pinch of austerity, but also for the Punto Fijo system itself. Pérez’s reforms spurred the Caracazo, a week-long outbreak of rioting that began in Caracas on February 27, 1989, and quickly spread throughout the country. This outburst “constituted a symbolic breaking point in the legitimacy of the democratic regime associated with the Pact of Punto Fijo initiated in 1958” (Lander, 2007, p. 25). The Caracazo precipitated subsequent protests and two 1992 coup attempts against president Pérez by the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200, a political group founded by Hugo Chávez in 1982 to oppose the corruption and elitism of the contemporary Venezuelan system (Gott, 2000). This legitimacy crisis was further compounded when former president Rafael Caldera (1969-1974) was elected president in 1993, not as a member of COPEI, one of the two parties that had governed Venezuela since 1958, but as leader of a new party, Convergencia (Convergence), created specifically to support his bid for office. The election of a non-AD/COPEI president marked the formal end of the Punto Fijo pact that had structured Venezuelan democracy since 1958.

The collapse of puntofijismo sent scholars scrambling to explain how such a seemingly stable and institutionalized system could fail. Academics variously attributed its demise to plummeting oil rents and the inherent corruption and inefficiency of petro-states (Karl, 1995; Karl, 1997), the decreasing ability of parties to maintain internal discipline and voter mobilization in an overly centralized system (Rey, 1991), or to the socioeconomic transformations associated with
decentralization and neoliberal reform (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; Ellner, 2008). Whatever the reasons, the end of the democratic pact opened unprecedented space for political outsiders in the electoral system. Members of the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 or MBR-200), sensing an opportunity, reconsidered their initial distaste for electoral politics and in 1997 created the Movimiento Quinta República (Fifth Republic Movement or MVR) with the intention of bringing lieutenant colonel Hugo Chávez Frías to office. After a campaign that drew together various left wing parties under the umbrella of the Polo Patriótico (Patriotic Pole) coalition, 44-year-old Chávez won 56 percent of the vote in the December 1998 election. “An entirely new era,” wrote Richard Gott (2000), “was about to begin” (p. 139).

In his fourteen years in power, a tenure that ended only when he died of cancer in March 2013, Chávez gained international notoriety as a flamboyant, charismatic and extraordinarily polarizing chief executive who took evident pleasure in simultaneously provoking those already inclined to disagree with him, on the one hand, and basking in the adoration of millions of his supporters, especially the urban poor, on the other (Fernandes, 2010). As a political celebrity of sorts, Chávez courted attention from American personalities including film directors Oliver Stone and Michael Moore, actors Danny Glover, Sean Penn, and Nicholas Cage, supermodel Naomi Campbell, baseball all-star Sammy Sosa, and Golden Globe nominee and rock icon Courtney Love, an equally polarizing figure with whom he shared a scandalous “wink” in 2009 (BBC, 2013). In the realm of foreign relations, Chávez earned a name for himself due to the considerable rhetorical flourish with which he made controversial critiques of American foreign policy, capitalism, and neoliberalism, perhaps most famously his 2006 speech at the United Nations General Assembly, where, speaking at the same rostrum as had U.S. President George
W. Bush a day earlier, he called the American head of state “the devil,” performed the sign of the cross, remarked that the area “still smells like sulphur,” and advised Bush to get psychiatric help. In later years, as his political agenda radicalized, he allied himself with avowedly anti-American autocrats including Zimbabwean dictator Robert Mugabe and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, earning scornful reproach from the Bush, Obama and Harper administrations, as well as Spanish king Juan Carlos I, who tersely told him to “shut up” after Chávez called a Spanish politician a “fascist” (Quinn, 2007).

Chávez was not all bombast. During his time in office the president steered Venezuela through a series of sweeping reforms that dramatically altered the country’s political, social and economic landscapes, a trajectory buoyed by significant oil rents after petroleum prices rose sharply in 2003, successive electoral majorities, and an organizationally weak opposition. As the harbinger of the “Left Turn,” the regional shift toward the election of candidates whose platforms are based on programmatic commitments to the reduction of economic and social inequality (Cameron and Hershberg, 2010; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011), Chávez became an increasingly controversial figure in national politics and the study thereof, inspiring fervent devotion from as many as he repelled. In 2008 Fernando Coronil described this situation as one where “particularly among Venezuelans — but also among those who follow Venezuelan events closely — it is easy for partial political differences of opinion to be construed as total personal ontological differences, for emotions to replace reasons, or to descend to ad hominem disqualifications in terms of political convenience, moral inferiority, crass material interests, or simply cognitive dysfunction” (p. 1). This polarization was one of the most defining characteristics of the Chávez era.
Those sympathetic to or explicitly supportive of Chávez often assess his time in office as a period of difficult but positive change for Venezuela. Confronted with an exhausted democratic pact and dysfunctional economic system, Chávez promised to rectify what he and his advocates viewed as the deficiencies of the previous liberal democracy. Always espousing leftist principles as part of his Bolivarian Revolution, an eponymous homage to nineteenth century independence leader Simón Bolívar, Chávez tried to engineer a participatory radical democracy based on the intensification of popular sovereignty and the deliberate erosion of representative democracy. Accordingly, his government encouraged direct participation in decision-making processes by convoking referenda, citizens’ assemblies, municipal councils and constituent initiatives in order to expand democratic norms and procedures beyond formal state institutions and into other areas of society and economy (Roberts, 1998; Alvarez, 2003; Wilpert, 2007; Spanakos, 2008; Cannon, 2009). The government’s ability to develop and implement these initiatives was in turn a product of repeated municipal, regional, and national electoral victories for Chávez and his party, the Movimiento V República (MVR, which became the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela [PSUV], or United Socialist Party of Venezuela, in 2010).

In addition to the reformation of formal political institutions, Chávez’s supporters argue, his government expended considerable effort and resources on redistributing wealth and rehabilitating social programs that had been gutted during the previous period of neoliberal reform. The entrenchment of extensive social rights in the new 1999 constitution, combined with greater state control over the petroleum industry and a sharp increase in oil wealth beginning in late 2003, allowed the government to funnel considerable resources to some of Venezuela’s most disenfranchised. The most significant examples of this strategy were the Bolivarian Missions, a series of anti-poverty programs created by presidential decree in 2003. These programs, some of
which initially benefitted from the assistance of Cuban physicians and educators, focused largely on improving access to nutrition, healthcare and education for low-income Venezuelans, especially the urban poor but also citizens in remote areas in the interior of the country (Hawkins, 2003; Daguerre, 2011). The Bolivarian Missions, among other such efforts, resulted in a significant decline in poverty, extreme poverty, and inequality, and contributed to substantial increases in access to healthcare and education (Weisbrot et al., 2009).

For critics of the Bolivarian process, however, particularly after 2006, when Chávez was re-elected to a second term and began to develop ambitious reform efforts to accelerate the process of “twenty-first century socialism,” the president was an ambassador of democratic erosion and a pernicious threat to regional stability, an unpredictable and unsophisticated populist without regard for representative institutions or liberal democratic traditions. To these scholars and citizens — some of whom were once supportive, if not uncritical — the Chávez government progressively turned Venezuela into an illiberal democracy, competitive authoritarian,4 and/or hybrid regime characterized by weakly institutionalized parties, increased executive power, extensive patronage networks, and excessive state centralization (Mayorga, 2006; Corrales and Penfold, 2007; Hawkins, 2010; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñan, 2015; Mazzuca, 2013). The Bolivarian Missions were roundly dismissed as ineffective and inefficient, little more than patronage machines designed to shore up support for the government especially during election campaigns. Chávez, in this view, is the figurehead of the “bad” (Casteñada, 2006) or “populist” (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011) Left, a "superpresident”5 (Mazzuca, 2013, p.

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4 Levitsky and Way (2002) define competitive authoritarian regimes as those where “formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority,” but where “incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent [...] that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy” (p. 52).

5 Mazzuca (2013) defines "superpresidentialism" as cases "in which the president dominates the entire decision-making process at the expense of the national legislature and receives nothing more than nominal scrutiny from other branches of government or nonpartisan oversight agencies” (p. 109).
that blurred the line between democratic and autocratic principles and practices by effectively pairing a majoritarian electoral strategy with the progressive concentration of bureaucratic and presidential power in the executive branch and governing party.

**Beyond Democracy and Dictatorship: State Power and Social Change**

Debates about whether Chávez was a democrat or a dictator continue to inspire many scholars that study Venezuela. In this dissertation, I take an alternative approach that foregrounds the relationship between the central state and social forces. Of course, questions of regime and state power are intimately related, and I comment on issues relating to democracy throughout this work. By focusing primarily on the realm of state-society relations, however, it is possible to understand the enduring role of state power in shaping reform outcomes. I focus particularly on two key power resources: autonomy, the ability of organizations to govern themselves and undertake political initiatives independently of constraints imposed by external authority, and capacity, the ability to implement decisions and reform proposals.

Many scholars agree that the Venezuelan state became increasingly autonomous in relation to existing domestic and international social forces over the thirteen-year period Chávez was in office, and that this autonomy went hand in hand with the growing material wealth absorbed by the central state during the oil boom that began in 2003. Politically, the government undertook a number of reforms to shift the balance of power in favour of the central state, beginning with the promulgation of the aforementioned 1999 constitution. This concentration and centralization of power in the executive branch often happened through deliberate institutional layering, where changes to the institutional landscape occurred “not through reforms or abolition of existing institutions, but rather from creating multiple coexisting sets of institutions that mutually shape one another” (Dickovick & Eaton, 2013, p. 1461). This strategy is reflected in the constitutional
inclusion of an electoral branch and a citizen branch of government (Wilpert, 2007, p. 37), the establishment of a new Venezuelan Capital District that assumed many powers formerly held by the Metropolitan Mayor (a position held by a prominent member of the opposition at the time the new district was created in 2009), and in the creation of organizations such as the Bolivarian Circles and the Communal Councils, voluntary associations where members discussed, decided upon, and helped coordinate social services and activities that supported goals of the Bolivarian movement (Handlin and Berins Collier, 2009, p. 322).

In the economic sphere the Chávez administration began to accumulate more autonomy at the expense of other national actors as early as November 2001, when it passed the first of several Enabling Laws. With this power to bypass the Assembly, the government enacted a package of 49 laws including two which “established majority government ownership of all mixed companies in charge of primary oil operations” and gave the state the authority to expropriate unused land (Ellner, 2008, p. 113). A year later, following a coup attempt against Chávez and a two-month strike/lockout by Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) elites who wanted to force the president to resign, Chávez fired those he deemed responsible (more than half the workforce), announced that PDVSA would begin to play a much greater role in funding social development efforts, and “renationalized” the oil company (Corrales and Penfold, 2007, p. 192). This further invested decision-making power over the nation’s most valuable resource in an increasingly centralized state. Other renationalizations included CANTV, a major telecommunications company that had been privatized in 1991 and returned to state oversight in 2007, and SIDOR, the country’s biggest steel company, which was privatized in 1997 and

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6 The details of this strike/lockout are discussed in Chapter 3.
7 This particular “renationalization” was a misnomer in that PDVSA had not reverted back to private ownership since being nationalized in 1976, but it was an important discursive strategy that signalled a break with the previous system.
likewise reverted back to state control in 2009 (Ohrangazi, 2013, 228). As was the case with PDVSA, these reforms were framed by the government as intended to return the institutions to the Venezuelan pueblo after having been usurped by elites during puntofijismo. Finally, on several occasions (in particular the 2007 constitutional referendum) the government tried (but failed) to increase its power over the Central Bank of Venezuela, despite constitutional recognition of the institution’s autonomy (Articles 218 and 311).

The progressive concentration of autonomy in the executive branch was partly conditioned by the increasing material capacity of the central state. The political conflicts that erupted in 2002, culminating in an April coup attempt and the oil strike that stretched from December 2002 to February 2003, had serious political and macroeconomic repercussions for Venezuela. The ideological lines had been drawn, and the Chávez administration firmly entered into an “anti-neoliberal stage” (Ellner, 2008, p. 112); no more were business and industry willing to abide what they perceived to be the anti-market tendencies of the government, and no more was the government willing to entertain the pro-capitalist ambitions of business and industry. The mediocre growth that the country had cautiously enjoyed shortly after Chávez took office vanished in the end of the first quarter of 2002, and in 2003 the national economy contracted by over ten percent, with inflation hitting 31 percent (Cannon, 2009, p. 63). Had this continued, the economic downturn and ensuing uncertainty could have had serious effects on the longevity of an administration that derived much of its legitimacy from the promises it made to redistribute wealth and reduce poverty.

It was of the government’s extraordinary fortune, then, that it had already reasserted control over PDVSA prior to the jump in international oil prices in September 2003. The ‘renationalization’ of PDVSA described above facilitated “the most spectacular oil boom in the
country’s history” (Corrales and Penfold, 2011, p. 47). Between 2003 and 2008 the OPEC basket price rose from $28 USD to nearly $150 USD (OPEC, 2014). In almost any circumstance this shift would have led to increased wealth for the Venezuelan state. But combined with the increased authority over PDVSA that occurred after the oil strike and the introduction of additional exchange and price controls that further benefited the state, the windfall was beyond what anyone could have expected even six months earlier. GDP skyrocketed by almost 23 billion USD (current prices) between 2002 and 2008, and oil rents rose from 24 percent of that GDP in 2002 to 41 percent in 2005. This growth far surpassed that which had occurred during the previous boom in the 1970s, investing the state and the Chávez administration with even more material wealth than Rafael Caldera and Carlos Andrés Pérez had enjoyed in the 1970s (Corrales & Penfold, 2011, p. 47).

The economic growth that began in 2003 was soon challenged by the emergence of a number of structural vulnerabilities often found in oil dependent states. “With the steady increase in oil revenue, the problem of commercial dependence had by 2007 reached an extreme” (Ellner, 2010, p. 80), putting the country in an enormously precarious position when OPEC basket prices collapsed by half in the fourth quarter of 2008 (Weisbrot & Johnston, 2012, p. 7). Other related pre-existing macroeconomic problems also started to present critical challenges for the state. Inflation rose from 22.5 percent in 2007 to almost 31 percent in 2008, a rate that continued to increase in the years to come (Ellner, 2010, p. 80). National production began to decline at the same time as demand increased, imports outpaced exports, and an increasingly hostile domestic climate for international investment signalled the end of the boom that began in 2003 (Ellner, 2010, p. 80). By 2010 Venezuela was in recession, a quandary to which it responded by taking
on significant debt (26 percent of GDP in 2012 [World Bank, 2014a]). By the end of Chávez’s second administration, the material capacity of the state was in serious question.

Two general narratives about the balance of state-society power between 1999 and 2012 have emerged out of these and similar events, narratives that I have already sketched out in the context of debates about regime type and which are broadly reflected in the conflict over the universalization of higher education. One is that these interventions were intended to strengthen democracy and a public sector that had been depressed as a result of economic crisis and neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s (Wilpert, 2007; Ellner, 2008; Ciccariello-Maher, 2013; Ohrangazi, 2013). The formal autonomy of key institutions such as PDVSA\(^8\) and the Central Bank was seen as a mechanism to protect private capital and preserve elitist structures of power, a theme that will become evident in the legislative conflicts discussed in Chapter 4. Removing or restricting this autonomy by expanding state power over select actors or by redesigning institutional features of the state was presented as a way to reduce inequality, improve standards of living, and establish direct, participatory democracy. The centralization and concentration of state power necessary to transform Venezuelan society and free it from entrenched interests, in other words, required a reduction in the autonomy of oppositional social forces.

The second narrative about state-society autonomy in the Chávez period — one evident in the positions of those opposed to the efforts of state and government elites to change the higher education system — is that the very same reforms were imprudent, misguided, and in the case of PDVSA, vindictive (Corrales & Penfold, 2007; Corrales & Penfold, 2011; Hawkins, 2010). In this view, the autonomy of historically important Venezuelan institutions like the Central Bank

\(^8\) Although PDVSA has been state-owned since its inception in 1976, it had considerably organizational autonomy prior to 1999.
signified a liberal arrangement of political and economic power, the erosion of which reduced protections against state interference and ultimately led to illiberal and authoritarian governance. Others have raised similar concerns about the recentralization of subnational power in the central state at the expense of governors and municipal politicians, not by suspending elections but by using a series of bureaucratic, institutional, policy, and societal strategies to bypass or undermine the autonomous power of subnational political actors (Dickovick and Eaton, 2013; Eaton, 2013).

Regardless of which view one holds about how autonomy and capacity shaped Venezuelan state-society relations between 1999 and 2012, the end result of the reforms undertaken during the Chávez period was the same: the restriction or elimination of the decision-making power of non-state elites led to increased formal and procedural state autonomy relative to non-state actors in a variety of institutional arenas. This was especially true for those institutions that had major roles in upholding the democratic pact and/or capitalist system, and which contributed to (and benefitted from) the asymmetrical distribution of power and wealth that the Bolivarian administration sought to correct. In effect, oil revenue enhanced both the state’s autonomy from owners of private capital, allowing Bolivarian elites to design ambitious reforms in a variety of policy arenas, and the capacity of the state, endowing it with the resources to act upon those policy goals.

**Higher Education Reform and the Bolivarian Revolution**

The state-society balance of autonomy and capacity outlined above shaped how the bitter divisions between supporters and opponents of the Chávez administration came to life in various policy arenas. As soon as Chávez took office, in February 1999, his government began to marshal state resources to increase accessibility to public higher education. The major focus of these “reform-mongers” (Hirschman, 1963) was on creating new institutions and programs
intended to increase the accessibility of post-secondary instruction and credentialization for poor students and students in remote areas. Key initiatives included Mission Sucre, a scholarship and preparatory program that helped students secure and finance spots in programs at public universities across the country, and the Bolivarian University of Venezuela, a new public institution explicitly dedicated to providing accessible public education in line with the development goals articulated in the 1999 constitution. Funding for these initiatives came from a variety of sources, including the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, the Ministry of University Education (later renamed the Ministry of Popular Power for Higher Education or MPPEU), and discretionary funds controlled by the office of the president. According to the MPPEU (2010), university enrolment increased 192 percent between 1998 and 2010, with 70 percent of students in 2010 studying at public universities. As a result of these initiatives, some researchers have described Venezuela as "the only country in Latin America where rhetoric and practice [about higher education] are clearly aligned" (Peralta and Pacheo, 2014, p. 622).

Despite the eagerness with which some scholars, policymakers, and supporters of the Bolivarian process cite these universalization initiatives as evidence of successful reform, a more comprehensive view of higher education policy during the Chávez years reveals a much more complicated (and contentious) situation. Not all actors in the higher education system were taken by this reimagination of their country or by the demonstration of increased state prowess in the public university system. Although public universities in Venezuela rely almost entirely on state funding and many actors within the university sector were eager to benefit from potential increases in social spending, a long history of state repression against the public universities contributed to a wariness about its expanding influence in organizational, administrative, and academic affairs, especially given the military backgrounds of key Bolivarian elites.
anxieties turned out to be prescient, for as the government radicalized and embraced twenty-first century socialism, it started to directly engage the autonomous universities. Unlike the universalization initiatives, however, these reforms proved much more difficult to accomplish. In 2001 and again in 2010, new education laws were passed by the National Assembly but not signed by Chávez, effectively removing them from the legislative agenda. In 2009, the National Assembly passed a new Organic Education Law which mandated that workers and administrative employees were to be considered equal members of the university community alongside professors, students, and alumni, and that those universities which held internal elections needed to revise their bylaws to reflect their inclusion. However, although the 2009 Organic Law was approved by the legislature and signed into law by the president, seven universities refused to change their electoral regulations to include administrative workers and labourers, citing violations of the constitutional right to university autonomy, the right of universities to govern themselves independently from the state. Even in the face of sanction by Venezuela’s highest court, which suspended 18 scheduled elections within these institutions, the universities did not back down and amend their bylaws.

This Janus-faced approach to education reform — the expansion of educational opportunity on the one hand, and the restriction of university autonomy on the other — resulted in a fractured and nearly ungovernable higher education system. A patchwork of laws from 1970 (Universities Law), 1999 (Bolivarian Constitution) and 2009 (Organic Education Law) led to contradictions and confusion about the legitimacy and legality of various measures taken by the state and the universities alike. With minimal fiscal allocations in annual federal budgets, university administrators were unable to engage in long-term strategic planning, and struggled to meet their pension and salary obligations. Planners and policy-makers within the state bureaucracy grew
divided over the appropriateness and feasibility of proposed reforms. Rectors and deans whose terms had expired but whom the usual electoral processes did not replace continued to occupy their posts and exercise their powers accordingly. Accusations of corruption and elitism were levied against those same university authorities by students and professors sympathetic to the government. Charges of blind partisanship and ideological dogmatism were hurled against teachers and students at the institutions created by the Chávez administration or which supported its goals. Professors of all political persuasions despaired that they were unable to teach or research to the best of their capabilities, and students likewise felt that they were pawns in a much larger political game. The project of university transformation, in short, was far more successful when it came to the expansion of access than it was with respect to overhauling the governance framework of the higher education system as a whole.

**Explaining Limited Reform**

This inconsistent implementation is the central puzzle of this dissertation. Why, with unprecedented oil wealth, dominance in the executive, legislative and judicial branches, and a largely demobilized opposition, was reform so elusive to the Venezuelan state and the government of Hugo Chávez? What enabled state and party elites to create so many new public institutions and programs, and what prevented them from implementing new governance structures within the existing public universities? In a certain sense, this is the inverse of what Merilee Grindle (2004) asked in the context of Latin American education reform in the 1990s: “how can we account for successful reform initiatives when the political cards are stacked against change?” (p. 1). I reframe this to suit the Venezuelan context and ask how we can account for unsuccessful reform initiatives when the political cards seemed to favour change.
To answer this question I conduct a qualitative comparative case study that compares four higher education reform initiatives (the universalization programs, the 2001 Organic Education Law, the 2009 Organic Education Law and the 2010 University Education Law). Drawing theoretical lessons from the state-in-society paradigm (Migdal, 1988; Migdal et. al, 1994; Migdal, 2001) and the strategic choice approach to policy reform (Grindle, 2004), I use the method of structured, focused comparison to assess why the outcomes of the initiatives varied so widely. My findings, primarily based on fieldwork conducted in Venezuela in 2012, indicate that the extent to which reform initiatives were adopted and implemented depended on how variation in the relative balance of power between the state and social forces (especially the oppositional universities) conditioned the decisions of key actors in the reform process. I find that the state was able to implement initiatives only when reformers had greater access to institutional autonomy (the power to make decisions free of external interference) and capacity (the ability to implement those decisions) than did oppositional actors within the university sector. I also find that autonomy and capacity interacted in different ways depending on the type and stage of reform. In the case of the universalization policies, which were primarily bureaucratic in nature, state autonomy was more critical than capacity during the agenda-setting, design, and adoption stages of reform, while capacity was the essential resource during implementation. In the cases of legislative reform, state autonomy was also critical during the agenda-setting and design stages. However, in contrast to the universalization reforms, the distribution of institutional capacity between the state and oppositional universities was far more consequential during the adoption stage, and the universities' autonomy proved essential during the implementation process.
The details of these arguments and findings are drawn out over four chapters. Chapter 1, “Institutional Power and Strategic Choice in University-State Relations,” establishes the theoretical framework and research design. Grounding my approach in the well-established state-in-society paradigm (Migdal, 1988; Migdal et al., 1994; Migdal, 2001), I make the case that a relational, procedural approach to state-society relations invites analysis of a decidedly political institution heretofore neglected in comparative politics: the university. Accordingly, I advance a new conceptualization of the university as a recursive, liminal, and eminently political institution located in the borderlands between 'state' and 'society,' serving both but not necessarily beholden to either. In a field that has historically neglected consideration of universities as consequential political actors, my dissertation tackles uncharted terrain by charting new avenues for political scientists interested in state-society relations, institutional change, and contentious politics, and encourages scholars of comparative higher education to better understand how universities are deeply embedded in surrounding matrices of institutional power.

Following this discussion, and again drawing from the state-in-society paradigm, I argue that the general balance of power (autonomy and capacity) between the state and the university sector shapes policy outcomes by conditioning how key actors make decisions. Here I adopt the strategic choice approach (Grindle, 2004) to move past conventional understandings of autonomy and capacity as static resources that have essentially the same impact across different stages of reform. Instead, I maintain that the outcomes of particular reform efforts are best understood by examining how pro- and anti-reform stakeholders are enabled and constrained by the relative availability of autonomy and capacity in each of the agenda-setting, design, adoption, and implementation stages of reform. Accounting for shifts in the balance of power at each stage of reform demonstrates precisely how even small changes in the relative distribution of power
can lead to significantly different dynamics between states and social actors and, consequently, produce different reform outcomes. The theoretical and conceptual foundations of this project therefore rest upon a relational, procedural understanding of political and institutional change appropriate for examination of an institution as complex as the modern university.

The basic implications of this approach to state-society relations are initially developed in Chapter 2, “‘We Rise to Greet the State, to Confront the State:’ Venezuelan State-University Relations, 1696-1998.” This chapter provides the first comprehensive English language overview of Venezuelan state-university relations from the colonial period until the election of Hugo Chávez in December 1998. I trace the evolution of different models of universities, including the Spanish-Catholic model of the colonial era, the Napoleonic model promoted after independence, the autonomous model that emerged after the Córdoba reforms in 1918, and the experimental model devised by the state during the Caldera administration in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I examine how state-university relations were mediated in each of these periods by considering the formal and empirical dimensions of university autonomy and capacity relative to the changing Venezuelan state, and centre the Renovation Movement of the late 1960s as an antecedent to the radical reform proposals that inspired the Chávez government decades later.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the case studies. Chapter 3, “The ‘Magical’ State: The Universalization of Venezuelan Higher Education,” is a study of the sweeping universalization reforms implemented in the public higher education system between 1999 and 2012. I argue that these reforms are best understood when disaggregated into three distinct periods of development: 1) 1999-2002, when the reform trajectory was set; 2) 2003-2009, the implementation of initial "municipalization" reforms; and 3) 2010-2012, the implementation of strategies intended to transform existing educational institutions. I argue the state's relative autonomy from social
forces was critical during the agenda-setting, design, and adoption stages, but that the state's material capacity proved to be much more consequential during implementation. The shape and pace of implementation, my research establishes, was not driven purely by changes in the domestic or international political economy. While transfers from the central state to the Ministry of University Education show an ever-increasing curve in current prices, my data demonstrates that when controlling for inflation, variation in expenditures did not correlate to overall GDP growth or electoral cycles. More important was the manner in which funds were distributed within the higher education system: expenditures (national budgets and the use of discretionary funds controlled by the president) were allocated by the Ministry in an increasingly asymmetrical manner, with state-supervised institutions receiving disproportionate amounts relative to formally autonomous universities. The state also made good use of existing infrastructure by transforming colleges and technical institutes into accredited, non-autonomous universities. I conclude that these dynamics are indicative of a recentralization and reconcentration of state power at the expense of the autonomous universities and higher education system more generally.

Chapter 4, “The Moribund State: The Limits of Legislative Reform,” offers the first in-depth comparison of three cases of legislative reform: the 2001 Organic Education Law, which the National Assembly approved unanimously on its first reading but which did not progress to a second; the 2009 Organic Education Law, which the National Assembly approved and which Chávez signed into law, and the 2010 University Education Law, which the National Assembly approved but which Chávez refused to sign. I further develop the argument that the different outcomes were caused by changes in the balance of power between the state and the university sector, and that the relative importance of institutional autonomy and capacity varied across
reform stage. In 2001 the state already had more capacity and autonomy than in 1999 but the lack of an effective interpretive framework meant that the legislative and executive branches of the government were at odds with each other, ultimately leading to the bill’s failure. In 2009 the state had more autonomy than the university sector during agenda-setting, design, and adoption phases due to greater executive-legislative cohesion and the insufficient capacity of universities to mount an effective political response, but the universities' formal autonomy and abilities to act as a unified bloc proved to be a critical resource during the implementation stage. Finally, in 2010 the state had more autonomy during the agenda-setting and design stages of reform, but the growing organizational capacity of the oppositional universities ultimately prevented the adoption of the bill. The universities were more cohesive and better organized than the state, in large part because they were able to capitalize upon the intrainstitutional, interinstitutional and cross-sectoral linkages developed during the contention surrounding the 2009 Organic Education Law, and because they had much a more compelling way to frame the conflict to the general public. The universities also benefitted from a greater political opportunity structure that resulted from emergent cleavages within the state and the loss of the governing party's supermajority in the 2010 election.

Taken together, Chapters 3 and 4 make several vital contributions to scholarship on contemporary Venezuela and the relevance of the university as a political actor in state-society relations. First, this research provides an essential corrective to the prevalent scholarly tendency to discuss the Venezuelan state as extraordinarily strong and the Chávez government as unconstrained by oppositional social and political forces. Although the vast increase in oil wealth after 2003 certainly enhanced the autonomy and capacity of government and state elites, particularly in areas of higher education policy that required reform at the level of the
bureaucracy, such reform rested on the shaky foundations of rentier populism. Oil rents inflated the state’s immediate material capacity, but this alone does not constitute state strength. While many scholars have noted the inherent problems with this form of economic policymaking as they relate to democratic governance, there is very little analysis of the implications of this in the realm of social policy. The absence of a transparent, efficient distributive apparatus that would facilitate sustainable long-term higher education planning, combined with declining organizational cohesion within the bureaucracy and an ineffective elite mastery of symbolic resources, illustrates the state’s vulnerability, not its prowess.

Building from the insight that the Venezuelan state was weaker than commonly assumed, my findings also make a necessary contribution regarding the relative strength of the Venezuelan opposition between 1999 and 2012. That internal divisions and poor strategic choices around electoral competition led the party opposition to squander its ability to formally restrain the ruling party is certainly remarkable in its own right, but dwelling on this self-sabotage neglects the effects of other important challengers and exaggerates the extent of oppositional weakness more broadly. As my findings show, the mobilization of universities as political actors resulted in multiple instances in which the Chávez government conceded to its opponents. This extra-parliamentary opposition cannot therefore be folded into the generic story of a uniformly weak opposition. Additionally, my account also tempers a tendency in the literature to characterize most grassroots social movements and civil society organizations as pro-Chávez, or at least as supportive of the larger Bolivarian project. My focus on the public universities as political actors reveals them to be a strategic and adaptable source of extra-parliamentary social opposition that proved far more effective than the bluster of opposition parties. In short, I provide needed nuance
to discussions of what the Venezuelan political opposition looked like – and the ways it was about to effectively counter state power – in this period of highly contentious reform.

Finally, in the dissertation’s Conclusion, I offer some parting thoughts regarding what this examination of higher education reform during the Chávez era can teach us about state-society relations in Venezuela and beyond. After discussing the effects of the university mobilizations on the party opposition and the long-term sustainability of the reforms in the post-Chávez period, I return to the injunction that political scientists would do well to consider universities as worthy of far greater attention than has historically been the case, and highlight again the fundamental theoretical and conceptual contribution of this dissertation: that autonomy and capacity combine in different ways at different stages of reform, and that the balance of this institutional power vis-à-vis the state and social forces determines the extent to which particular initiatives are adopted and implemented. Although the focus here is on a particular period of Venezuelan history, my conclusion suggests possibilities for fruitful comparative research by political scientists and scholars of comparative higher education alike.
Chapter 1

Institutional Power and Strategic Choice in University-State Relations

If the essential concern of politics is “who gets what, when, and how” (Laswell, 1936), matters of education — particularly formal education, the practices of certified teaching, learning and assessment that occur between teachers and students in structured environments such as schools, colleges, and universities (OECD, 2014, p. 397) — can only be considered fundamentally political. Questions of power, justice and authority are mediated through issues of educational quality and accessibility, the demarcation of administrative and organizational responsibility, conditions surrounding the production and dissemination of knowledge, and a host of related concerns that demonstrate the centrality of politics (and therefore the necessity of political analysis) to the study of education.

In this chapter, I argue that a rigorous study of the politics of higher education requires a robust framework for analysis that enables both historical specificity and the production of generalizable conclusions, and that this is best accomplished by emphasizing the relational and procedural. Accordingly, I explore the issue of state-university relations with reference to the state-in-society paradigm (Migdal et al., 1994; Migdal, 2001) and Merilee Grindle’s (2004) strategic choice approach to policy reform. Drawing from both, I argue that the university needs to be understood as an explicitly political institution within the broader context of state-society relations, one that occupies a liminal position in relation to state-society boundaries. Outcomes of particular reform initiatives are primarily determined by 1) the distribution of institutional power, understood here as organizational autonomy (the ability to make decisions and pursue goals free of external interference) and capacity (the ability to implement those decisions), and 2) the strategies of engagement chosen by reform advocates and opponents during different phases
of the reform process. I close the chapter by introducing how this theoretical discussion shapes the methodological approach and research design that guides the subsequent empirical chapters.

**Conceptualizing States and Social Forces**

Social theorists take a variety of approaches to the question of how states and social forces interact with each other. In this dissertation, I explore state-society relations through the lens of the state-in-society paradigm, a framework for analysis that counters earlier society-centered (pluralist and Marxist) approaches to social relations and that tempers (but is deeply influenced by) later statist claims about the primacy of the modern bureaucratic state as the main agent of social change. State-in-society theorists caution against overdetermined and unidirectional accounts of state power, arguing that the state plays a central role in political outcomes but that it must be understood as a social organization in and of itself, that it is *in* society and therefore subject to a range of social pressures (Migdal et al., 1994; Migdal, 2001). Theorists pair emphasis on structural, institutional and organizational factors with an acknowledgement of the importance of interpretive frameworks, symbolic resources, and the oftentimes fraught process of constructing the “mattering maps” (Goldstein, 1983, p. 22) that define how different social groups determine what and who are of value.

Joel Migdal, the scholar who pioneered the state-in-society framework, proposes a definition of the state influenced by the classic Weberian tradition but amended to demystify its power and scope. Migdal (2001) understands states not as strictly bounded entities but as “field[s] of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts” (p. 16). By image, Migdal refers to the promotion of an idealized model of the state as a totalizing, omnipresent, or ‘finished’ institution. Elites at various locations within the state project an image or
representation of the state as the “dominant and single centre of society,” an autonomous,
centralized, bounded and unified institution with command over other social forces, in order to
“[induce] people to perceive its agencies as generically integrated and acting in conjunction with
one another” (pp. 16-17). This “imagining” is an example of the “meaning work” of modern
states, or the process of mobilizing ideas, symbols, and meanings (Benford and Snow, 2000, p.
615). Because the terms of state-society interaction continually change, the task of representing
the state is an ongoing process that highlights its fundamentally unfinished or transitory nature.
In turn, representations of the state can lead to the exaggeration of state capabilities by state
elites (and scholars) keen to convince themselves of the state’s hegemonic power.

The ability of state elites to project an image of the state as a uniform, powerful institution is
largely dependent upon how this work is carried out by “multiple parts,” the varied
organizations, networks and actors that form the institutional apparatus, territorial borders, and
social boundaries of the modern bureaucratic state. In this sense it is clear that the state is not just
an ephemeral image but also a powerful and internally differentiated institutional actor. Migdal
suggests that the state can be disaggregated into four levels that reflect where power is located,
both in terms of which people carry out the work of the state and how the spatial dimensions of
state power are arranged (see Figure 1.1). The state’s top executive leadership sits at the apex of
the state hierarchy, or the commanding heights, and governs from the capital. Below this top
level of authority (but still within the capital) are the state’s central offices, the “nerve centres” or
ministries where policies are developed across a diverse range of issue arenas (Migdal, 1994, p.
16). Moving away from the capital and down the state hierarchy are the regional and local
offices that decide how to apply national policy to local contexts. Finally, at the bottom of the
state hierarchy and spread across but within its territorial boundaries, sit those state actors tasked
with carrying out these policies. In these “trenches,” bureaucrats and state functionaries encounter the consent, acquiescence or resistance of citizens and residents (“dispersed local populations”) as they attempt to implement new practices or policies designed by higher levels of state authority (Migdal, 1994, p. 16). At each of these four levels, the state generally uses rational-legal authority to accomplish the representational, administrative, and regulatory “maintenance work” (Scott, 1990, p. 45) needed to organize its institutional power.

![Figure 1.1. The Disaggregated State (adapted from Migdal (2001).)

This combination of images and practices produces a state that is, at least in its ideal form, capable of developing and implementing policy in multiple social arenas. However, the effectiveness of the state depends on its ties to society and the empirical contingencies of its engagements with non-state actors and organizations, or what Mann (1986) calls “social networks” (pp. 3-17). Accordingly, states and social forces must be conceptualized as mutually constitutive and perpetually changing. As states and social forces engage in struggles for domination and accommodation in multiple social and political arenas, they become embedded in a process of mutual change that alters their boundaries, objectives, and behaviours. This “recursive” dynamic, or “the mutually transforming interactions between components of the state and other social forces” (Migdal, 1994, p. 9), affects the very nature of the state and the social
organizations with which it contends. Rather than upholding the ontological conceit that there is a stable boundary demarcating the state and society at large, this “revisionist statism” (Wang, 1999, p. 231) understands the state as perpetually in tension with social forces and therefore as continuously in the process of being remade.

The outcomes of these transformative engagements between states and social forces vary. Interactions can produce positive-sum conclusions that benefit all parties (what state-in-society theorists refer to as “mutual empowerment”), negative sum outcomes that cost both (“mutual disempowerment”), or zero-sum outcomes that benefit one at the expense of the other. These outcomes fundamentally depend upon the balance of institutional or organizational power between states and engaged social forces, where 'power' consists of the combined force of organizational autonomy and capacity. Autonomy refers to the extent to which organizations have the prerogative or authority to develop and pursue objectives independent of other domestic or international social forces or institutional actors. An autonomous state is one that can “formulate and pursue goals that are not simply reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes or society” (Skocpol, 1985, p. 9). Similarly, an autonomous social organization is one that directs its own activities according to its members' interests and without undue interference by the state or other social forces (Bratton, 1994, p. 235). When a state lacks autonomy relative to social forces, it may face considerable constraints during stages of the policymaking process that involve making decisions about reform trajectories.

In turn, capacity refers to the ability of organizations to implement the decisions reached by their members. Scholars have produced an extensive body of literature that considers various indicators or sources of capacity, including technical, administrative, political, symbolic, and extractive dimensions (Cingolani, 2013; Evans, 1995; Evans et al., 1985; Grindle, 1996; Grindle
and Thomas, 1991; Hendrix, 2010; Popov, 2011; Soifer, 2015, p. 10; Tilly, 1975). Again following Migdal (2001, p. 107), I understand capacity as that which is produced by material, organizational, and symbolic resources. State capacity in particular is the ability of the institution to “implement official goals, especially over the actual or potential opposition of powerful social groups or in the face of recalcitrant socioeconomic circumstances” (Skocpol, 1985, p. 9; see also Grindle, 1996, p. 8). Strong or high capacity states are those which are "generally better equipped to establish a monopoly of violence, enforce contracts, control their populace, regulate institutions, extract resources, and provide public goods" (Soifer and vom Hau, 2008, p. 220), key features of the Weberian bureaucratic state. Capacity is therefore primarily a concern not of the origins of reform initiatives but of the effectiveness with which they are carried out.

Scholars frequently discuss the state's ability to accomplish the tasks described by Soifer and vom Hau with reference to infrastructural power, “the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions [sic] throughout that realm” (Mann, 1984, p. 189). For the purposes of this dissertation, the concept is useful because it addresses two critical elements of state power, the spatial and the relational. The study of infrastructural power draws attention to the reach of the state across its national territory, revealing potential subnational variation in the extent or shape of state power in different regions and municipalities. This analysis complements the preoccupation of state-in-society theorists with understanding politics beyond the capital, and especially in the contested borderlands of the state-society divide. Additionally, and again dovetailing with a foundational premise of the state-in-society approach, Mann's concept highlights the relational basis of state-society interactions.

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9 Mann (1984) distinguishes infrastructural power from despotic power, the “range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups (p. 188). Whereas infrastructural power can be framed as "power through" society, despotic power implies "power over" society (Schroeder, 2006, p. 3).
By foregrounding how states and social forces shape each other by forging various organizational connections, scholars can "move past debates that juxtapose state and society as opponents to examine the varied forms of their interaction" (Soifer and vom Hau, 2008, p. 222). The study of infrastructural power therefore enhances analyses of state capacity more generally, especially in relation to social forces.¹⁰

Three important and interrelated points follow from this understanding of strength or power as a matter of autonomy and capacity. First, while both autonomy and capacity are important determinants of organizational strength and “often appear together and reinforce one another” (Bratton, 1994, p. 236), they are fundamentally distinct sources of power, combine in various ways, and have different effects on state-society dynamics. For example, an organization may have considerable decision-making or agenda-setting authority (autonomy) but may lack the ability (capacity) to effectively implement those decisions. Conversely, an organization may have significant material, organizational, or symbolic resources but not the power to direct or allocate them (Soifer, 2008, p. 224). It is therefore essential to avoid falling into tautological accounts where autonomy is invoked as a proxy for capacity (and vice versa). Conceptually distinguishing the origins and characteristics of these sources of power ensures that they do not become blurred or unintelligible, and that the integrity of explanation can be maintained.

Second, autonomy and capacity, separately and as they combine as ‘strength,’ must be understood relationally. The balance of organizational power available to actors in struggles for domination or accommodation ultimately determines state strength and weakness. Rather than deeming organizations strong if they surpass a certain threshold of measurable attributes (or weak if they do not), the true test of strength can be determined only by exploring the details of the relative distribution of power between different organizations embedded in society (Evans, 1995).

¹⁰ For elaboration on the relationship between autonomy and infrastructural power, see Soifer and vom Hau (2008).
1995; Franceschet and Diez, 2012; Migdal, 2001). The stronger an organization relative to the others in its radius, the more likely it is to achieve a favourable outcome. Thus, even when two organizations engaged in a struggle for power are regarded as generally weak, the stronger of the two will still have an advantage.

Thirdly and finally, accounts of state-society relations must be careful not to omit consideration of the role of human agency. “Institutions,” write Thelen and Steinmo (1992), “constrain and refract politics but they are never the sole ‘cause’ of outcomes” (p. 3). \(^ {11}\) Accounts of state-society relations that minimize collective actors' strategic choices can lead to overly deterministic accounts of change that minimize the contingency and uncertainty inherent not only in broad dynamics of state-society transformation but also in specific public policy arenas. Autonomy and capacity produce and are produced by the institutional context, but proponents of reform (individuals and organizations) make consequential choices related to the timing, pace, and type of reform. Accordingly, I now turn to Grindle's strategic choice approach as a framework for analyzing how actors position themselves and engage with each other given the institutional opportunities and constraints in a particular reform setting.

**Strategic Choice and the Policymaking Process**

Merilee Grindle's strategic choice approach (2004) emphasizes the relational and the procedural elements of political engagement, much like the state-in-society paradigm, but focuses primarily on the outcomes of specific initiatives rather than broad patterns of social transformation writ large. \(^ {12}\) Given my particular concern with the higher education arena, this framework provides a useful analytical apparatus for exploring the nuances of reform initiatives.

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\(^ {11}\) Fox (1992) argues that the state-in-society approach does not quite fit within the historical institutionalist tradition, but that both provide an “analytic bridge” between theories that emphasize the state and theories that are society-centred.

\(^ {12}\) See also Grindle and Thomas (1991) for an earlier iteration of this framework.
on a case-by-case basis. While Grindle explicitly acknowledges that institutional distributions of power are important factors in accounting for policy success or failure, she argues that that they are not sufficiently explanatory. Instead, “reform initiatives need to be viewed as dynamic political processes that unfold over time, as complex chains of decisions subject to the interaction of reform advocates and opponents in particular institutional contexts that are sometimes subject to alteration” (Grindle, 2004, p. 15). Reformers make deliberate decisions at each step of the policymaking process, using the institutional resources at their disposal and responding as necessary to challenges they encounter. Although Grindle focuses primarily on the strategic choices of these reformers, opponents similarly make decisions about when and how to challenge policy initiatives based on the opportunities and constraints before them. These contentious engagements shape subsequent stages of policy reform, demonstrating the recursive nature of the policy process and reinforcing the importance of a relational analysis.

Grindle's approach to policy reform is informed by a familiar model of the reform process. In much the same way as the overall power of an organization can vary according to the issue arena at hand, the strategic choice framework requires attention to particular sequences of reform. Public policy scholars have long drawn attention to the utility of analyzing reform efforts with a "stage heuristic" model that distinguishes between agenda-setting, policy design, adoption, implementation, and evaluation phases (Kingdon, 1984; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983). Franceschet and Diez (2012) argue that a mechanistic focus on stages of the policy process assumes that the state is the only or most important protagonist in policy reform, an assumption that does not hold especially in the context of pervasive state weakness in much of the Global

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13 It should be uncontroversial to recognize that an organization may have significant autonomy or capacity in one policy arena but lack it in another. As Krasner (1978) notes in the case of the state, “there is no reason to assume a priori that the pattern of strengths and weaknesses will be the same for all policies. One state may be unable to alter the structure of its medical system but be able to construct an efficient transportation network, while another can deal relatively easily with getting its citizens around but cannot get their illnesses cured” (p. 58).
South. While it is true that a basic premise of the strategic choice approach is that reform consists of "deliberate efforts on the part of government to redress perceived errors in prior and existing policy and institutional arrangements" (Grindle and Thomas, 1991, p. 4), and that it is therefore more focused on state and government actors than on social forces, the heuristic utility of a sequential approach to policymaking enables a more nuanced understanding of state-society interactions at each stage of the reform process.

If autonomy is understood as a matter of prerogative and capacity as a matter of ability to see projects through, and if the distribution of power between the state and social forces shapes how pro- and anti-reform forces engage with each other, it follows that the relative importance of autonomy and capacity might vary depending on the stage and type of reform. During the agenda-setting and design stages, the degree of state autonomy — the state's ability to exercise its own prerogative independently of dominant social groups or international actors — has tremendous bearing on how reformers conceive, discuss, and plan initiatives. During the adoption stage, the relative importance of autonomy and capacity partially depends on the nature of the approval process. The adoption of bureaucratic proposals by state elites, for example, is likely to involve significantly less interaction with social forces than the approval of a bill in a legislature, a much more visible and contentious institutional arena where the capacity of oppositional organizations to resist proposals may constrain would-be reformers. Finally, in the implementation stage, which can again involve extensive contact between state reformers and social forces, the state’s ability to draw upon the material, organizational, and symbolic resources constitutive of capacity can be crucial as new policies, programs, and infrastructure are brought to local contexts where oppositional social actors may have the capacity to mount challenges or
the autonomy to try to disengage (Bratton, 1994, p. 236; Franceschet and Diez, 2012; Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Grindle, 2004).  

By distinguishing between types and stages of reform, I am not asserting that there is a deterministic relationship between sources of power, stages of reform, and the kinds of initiatives undertaken by reformers, nor am I claiming that only one power resource is exclusively relevant during a particular stage. The autonomy and capacity of states and social forces continually interact during each phase of the reform process. Rather, I make these distinctions to emphasize that the distribution of power between states and social forces varies sequentially and according to the institutional channels through which a particular reform initiative must pass. Actors therefore make decisions about how to most effectively engage depending on the particular balance of power at each phase of reform and according to their particular context.

With these theoretical and conceptual foundations so established, I now turn to an examination of how variation in the balance of institutional power can shape the decisions of pro- and anti-reform forces in the context of higher education reform. Recalling Skocpol’s (1985) argument that “overall assessments [of state strength] are perhaps best built up from sectorally specific investigations” (p. 17), I explore how analysis of the politics of higher education reform can shed light on specific conflicts, actors, and interactions within the broader context of state-society relations — or as Mitchell (2006) puts it, how the “political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and society is produced” (p. 170). In the remainder of this chapter I provide a brief overview of the state of political science

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14 Grindle and Thomas (1991) also distinguish between "public" and bureaucratic reactions reforms during the implementation stage. Public reaction during implementation is likely to be strong, for example, when a reform initiative costs politically significant social groups (particularly when the state itself is perceived to benefit), or when implementation requires extensive participation from the population. In contrast, the outcomes of reforms which do not directly affect a significant proportion of the population or which are less visible to the general public are more likely to be affected by reactions within the state bureaucracy (pp. 133-141).
scholarship on the politics of education and interpret a politics of higher education reform through the framework advanced above.

**Political Science and the Politics of (Higher) Education**

In 1959 the American Political Science Review published what is widely considered to be the first scholarly article about the politics of education. In this seminal paper, Thomas Eliot impugned the tendency of American educators to harbour a “professional distrust” (p. 1034) of scholars or politicians keen on viewing education as political. Urging these teachers and administrators to recognize that ‘politics’ need not mean the expansion of state control and the dismissal of professional expertise, and similarly encouraging political scientists to devote more than “a chapter or two in a text on state and local government,” Eliot argued that “it is high time to stop being frightened by a word. Politics includes the making of government decisions, and the effort or struggle to gain or keep the power to make those decisions. Public schools are part of government. They are political entities. They are a fit subject for study by political scientists” (p. 1035). There is value, he maintained, in the systematic study of how ideologies, institutions and interests shape the organization and provision of education, and how the study thereof can contribute to a better understanding of government’s relationship to the educational profession.

In the decades since Eliot's article was published, the study of education within political science has not advanced particularly far. In 1978 noted scholar of education Burton Clark argued that “of all the social sciences, political science remains the least involved in the study of educational organization” (p. 172), in 2011 Routledge published an edited volume entirely based on the premise that educational scholarship is a “neglected research field” in political science (Jakobi et al., 2011, p. 3), and most recently Thomas Gift and Erik Wibbels (2014) bemoaned that unlike other social science disciplines, particularly sociology and economics, the
contemporary study of educational politics remains in “regrettable” shape (p. 292). Despite the emergence of some research trajectories focused on public policy issues such as school reform (see Gift and Wibbels, 2014, p. 293) and the role of education in state formation, nationalism, democratization, and democratic consolidation (Diamond, 1999; Green, 2013; Lipset, 1960; Nemic, 2006; Soifer, 2015), political scientists interested in education lack an identifiable community of scholars, any disciplinary journals or professional associations dedicated to the subject, and an overarching methodological and analytical framework within which researchers can situate themselves. The result is a situation where “scholars make vital contributions to education in other disciplines, but we inch along, despite everyone from parents to donors to firms insisting that education is central to the world’s most profound social challenges” (p. 292).  

These bleak assessments of the state of educational research in political science point to an overall deficit of scholarship within the discipline. This deficiency is particularly noticeable with respect to research on higher education, which has historically received very little attention compared to primary or elementary education. This lack can be at least partially attributed to a number of factors, including the fact that some states do not have well developed higher education systems, and that fewer people access higher education than primary or secondary

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15 Various scholars identify a number of reasons for this poor performance. Gift and Wibbels cite difficulties with data and the fact that questions relating to education often require attention to social issues typically viewed outside the purview of the discipline, such as intramural dynamics and perceptions of social mobility. Others argue that this deficit reflects larger disciplinary divisions regarding the role of method and theory in political science. As the behaviouralist approaches of the 1950s and 1960s fell out of favour, political scientists variously turned to rational choice, culturalist, and institutionalist approaches to study the political world. The result was the formation of an “eclectic, messy centre” situated between, on the one hand, “the new students of political culture, inspired by a variety of postmodern or culturally relativistic claims, who doubt the value of causal explanations altogether and thus of conventional social science theorizing in comparative politics,” and, on the other, those scholars dedicated to testing nomothetic claims through deduction and formal modeling” (Kohli et al., 1996, pp. 1-2). Scribner et al. argue that the transition away from behaviourism facilitated exciting research on questions of government, conflict, power and policy, but did not lead to a strong, integrated framework for analysis (Heck, 2004, 15). As a result, the study of the politics of education remains methodologically, ontologically and epistemologically fragmented, a sort of “academic hybrid” that has had “difficulty establishing an identity” (Scribner et al., 2003, p. 16).
education, making it less immediately relevant to much of the population (especially in areas where education is a scarce public good).\textsuperscript{16} Fortunately, this situation is beginning to change as political scientists recognize the critical importance of universities and higher education systems in various political, economic, and social arenas. Scholars of international relations have been especially eager to explore the role of higher education in world politics, holding panels at four consecutive annual International Studies Association general meetings to consider how we "might better understand the university as a significant 'global' actor" in world politics (Kamola and Noory, 2014, p. 599).\textsuperscript{17} This interest dovetails with contemporary trends in the field of comparative higher education, which is increasingly concerned with the internationalization of higher education and the role of supranational governance bodies in the coordination of national systems (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Dodds, 2008; Heinze and Knill, 2008; Resnik, 2006).\textsuperscript{18}

Comparative political scientists have been somewhat more reluctant to explore the politics of higher education, concentrating their efforts on two general areas of inquiry. First, the rise of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s triggered a genre of social movement research that explored the role of students in independence, anti-war, civil rights, feminist, and environmental movements (Lipset and Altbach, 1969; Lipset, 1967; Lipset, 1972). This work focused less on mobilization intended to stimulate internal institutional reform than on the effects of student participation on national polities,\textsuperscript{19} and generally bypassed consideration of other actors within

\textsuperscript{16} Scholars from other disciplines, especially history, have directly considered the politics of higher education and of universities in particular. See, for example, Ogechi Emmanuel Anyanwu (2011) for an account of the role of university education in Nigerian nation-building, Blake Pattridge (2004) for an exploration of how higher education shaped state-building in Guatemala, and John Craig (1984) for research on how higher education shaped the German and French nation-states.

\textsuperscript{17} These panels led to the publication of a symposium in \textit{PS: Political Science and Politics} in 2014.

\textsuperscript{18} Jane Knight (2003) defines internationalization in the higher education context as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery or post-secondary education" (p. 2).

\textsuperscript{19} Some literature outside of political science considers the role of student protest in the creation of women’s studies programs, and Black, Latino/a, and Indigenous studies programs (Leibman, 1970; Biondi, 2012; Rogers, 2012).
universities as well as the extent to which universities can act as cohesive political institutions that shape and are shaped by interactions with other social forces. Some more contemporary scholarship also considers the role of student mobilization against neoliberalism, globalization, and privatization in various national and transnational contexts (Ayotte-Thompson and Freeman, 2012; Begin-Caouette and Jones, 2015; Grugel and Nem Singh, 2015; Olcese et al., 2014).

A second area of higher education research in comparative political science concerns the role of universities and other higher educational institutions in promoting economic development and innovation. This approach is perhaps best embodied in the varieties of capitalism paradigm, a research program concerned with explaining national labour market structures and comparative advantage in OECD states (Hall and Soskice, 2003). Such scholars view higher education as a key variable in larger questions about how governments and firms can complement each other’s labour supply and demand, and explore how universities (and to a lesser extent colleges) can equip states, regions, or international networks with the knowledge and expertise to promote economic productivity and competitiveness in a global context where capital is increasingly delinked from nation-states and where new rising economic actors threaten the hegemony of OECD powers. Themes of the ‘knowledge economy,’ ‘information society,’ ‘innovation clusters,’ ‘knowledge workers,’ ‘human capital’ and ‘creative classes’ highlight the economic importance of universities and, by extension, their relevance for study (Gertler and Vinodrai 2012; Iacobucci and Tuohy, 2005; Lane and Johnstone, 2012; Pusser et al., 2012; Temple, 2012). From this perspective, the politics of reform and the notion of "taking public universities seriously" (Iacobucci and Tuohy, 2005) matter largely insofar as they bear on innovation and economic development; higher education is a means to an end rather than a rich issue arena unto itself.
For comparativists, then, there is much to be explored. Following international relations scholarship that recognizes that "universities are an exceptionally ambiguous and complicated political actor" in world politics (Kamola and Noory, 2014, p. 600), I argue that the thorough study of universities and national higher education systems can provide insight into domestic political dynamics involving governments, states, markets, and social forces, including the issue of "whether universities primarily reproduce existing social and power relations or whether they provide important spaces of resistance and transformation" (Kamola and Noory, 2014, p. 601). In particular, the state-in-society paradigm’s concern with “the basic moral order and the very structure within which the rights and wrongs of everyday social behaviour should be determined” (Migdal et al., 1994, p. 21) provides ample opportunity to examine the ways in which knowledge and education are “constantly in the middle of struggles over the meaning of democracy, over definitions of legitimate authority and culture, and over who should benefit the most from government policies and practices” (Apple, 2003, p. 1). Given the extent to which universities produce elites, a key factor that differentiates them from primary and secondary schools, the analysis of these institutions is especially relevant to questions of power and governance. In this spirit of inquiry, the section that follows draws from the state-in-society paradigm to advance a conceptual framework for analyzing the university as a political institution in the context of higher education reform and state-society relations more broadly.

Universities in State-Society Relations

Higher education systems vary considerably in organization and administration, but all are premised upon a certain distribution of authority between states (central or subnational) and the institutions responsible for teaching, learning, and research. Universities, defined here as hierarchical, bureaucratic, corporate, public or private institutions primarily concerned with the
provision of higher education and the pursuit of knowledge through teaching and research (Clark, 1984), are usually the most prominent institutions in higher education systems. Modern universities vary tremendously in organization, administration, size, purpose, reputation, and membership, all of which are affected by historical contingencies of state formation and consolidation, relationships with ecclesiastical and state authorities, dynamics of colonization and decolonization, levels of economic development, interstate conflict, and international flows of labour and capital. My focus is specifically on the Western model of the university that emerged out of medieval Europe, a genesis briefly taken up in Chapter 2.

A state-in-society interpretation of higher education reform in this spirit requires consideration of the university as a discrete social institution that articulates and advances its own interests amid complex relationships with competing or cooperative forces. Conceiving of the university as a collective actor or an “agent of history” (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992, p. 10) is not to anthropomorphize it, but instead to use a “metaphorical shorthand” (Evans, 1995, p. 19) to describe and explain the coherent or “rational” institutional action that results from centralized decision making and the mobilization of intrauniversity actors invested in advancing or defending the university’s institutional interests (Skocpol, 1985; Elster, 1995; Elster, 2007). Although there may not be complete agreement among actors within the university hierarchy, shared goals such as securing adequate state funding and ensuring organizational dominion over curriculum development may generate sufficient consensus about a desired course of action to transform the university into a “combatant in the political arena” (de Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002, p. 473).

Precisely where the university is located in relation to the state and other social organizations is a matter of some contextual contingency. On the one hand, only rarely has it been a crude arm
of the state. On the other, it has never been truly untouched by state power. The university is best conceptualized as a liminal political institution in the borderlands between state and society, a social organization with significant and enduring connections to the state’s bureaucracy but one that is also deeply rooted in social context. As Naomi Chazan (1994) describes such institutions,

> [T]hey occupy crucial positions at the interstices of economic, social, cultural, and political fields. Within these frameworks various human, symbolic, material, and political issues are contested and negotiated, and power is either aggregated, redistributed, or dispersed. They are thus vital forces of analysis for those concerned with unraveling the ways “in which people at different levels of social agency have mobilized and organized resources, allies and ideas in a continuous effort to cope with changing circumstances.” Situationaly, these groups constitute the locus of interaction of different levels of social organization and “force attention to the institutions and arenas in which decisions are articulated.” These associations and institutions together form the structural building blocks of civil society, which horizontally joins diverse interests and groups are various levels in normatively bounded organizational settings (p. 257).

This liminality is especially evident in the case of public universities (often characterized as ‘national,’ ‘state’ or ‘official’), which rely in whole or in part on states for funding, are embedded within wider national or subnational higher education systems,20 are often mandated to fulfill national development goals, and are regulated by ministries of education and development.21 Understanding the university as liminal allows the conceptual space necessary to account for considerable variation in ideal-typical and historical models, from those institutions created and fully funded by the state, where faculty members are remunerated as civil servants and where it is sometimes difficult to differentiate universities from the state apparatus, to those which are far more decentralized and have significant distance from state bureaucratic control

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20 These systems usually include public or private vocational colleges, research institutes, and other forms of adult or post-secondary educational programs.

21 Many universities and higher education systems also voluntarily hold themselves accountable to research and/or accreditation organizations that “provide a formal external framework for university governance and shape the relationship between the university, the state, and its surrounding environment” (Dobbins, 2011, 34).
(Clark, 1983b). Liminality is therefore “not a problem of conceptual precision but a clue to the nature of the phenomenon” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 170).

This description of the university as a cohesive but interstitial institution must be understood in conjunction with a nuanced view of its internal political dynamics and investment in representative practices. Like the state, although not reified to nearly the same degree, the university exists and operates as a combination of images and practices. University elites are invested in producing representations or “images” of the institution as coherent and unified, albeit not as an expansive, dominant, or singular centre of political power. Instead, universities typically (and not inaccurately) present themselves as centres of knowledge production, as communities of scholars engaged in a common search for objective truths that will benefit the nation-state. Olsen (2007) argues that universities generally promote one of four types of stylized self-representations (see Table 1.1), and often have crests, mottos, mission statements, and sometimes even hymns that reinforce their legibility, establish community norms and membership, and inscribe them with social relevance and value. In each case, these representations help universities gain and maintain legitimacy relative to each other and, sometimes, in contrast to state power.

Table 1.1. Stylized Visions of the University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining Characteristics</th>
<th>Rule-governed community of scholars</th>
<th>Instrument for shifting national political agendas</th>
<th>Representative democracy</th>
<th>Enterprise embedded in markets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to free inquiry, rigorous scholarship and learning, and search for truth regardless of political or economic gain. Emphasis on merit and competence.</td>
<td>Instrument for implementing policies of democratically elected leaders. Scholarship and learning should help achieve solutions to problems and assist national development goals.</td>
<td>Internal democracy based on representation of constituent groups. Decisions are made through consensus, coalition-building, and accommodation.</td>
<td>Knowledge is a commodity to be sold to in a competitive market. Universities provide research and teaching to stakeholders on a for-profit basis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Source: Olsen (2007)
Like the state, representations of the university are reinforced by the practices of its multiple parts (see Figure 1.2). University authorities — usually rectors, presidents and/or chancellors — sit at the top of the institutional hierarchy, governing from the commanding heights. These authorities are supported by central administrative offices (roughly equivalent to the central offices of the state) including deans, provosts, faculty heads and non-academic departments such as financial affairs, human resources, and in some cases centres for teaching and research advancement. Department chairs and heads of schools follow in the university hierarchy, accepting responsibility for implementing administrative and academic decisions in their local academic contexts. Finally, professors, course instructors, teaching assistants, and researchers occupy a station roughly equivalent to the “trenches” of the state. These figures are responsible for implementing university policy in their classrooms and labs as they teach, research, and otherwise carry out the academic missions of their universities.

![Figure 1.2. The University Hierarchy](image)

There is an important conceptual distinction to be made between the hierarchical administrative and organizational features of the university and the ‘university community,’ those groups of people that participate in university affairs. University communities typically consist of professors and students, although sometimes alumni and non-academic employees
may be incorporated into membership. Whereas professors often assume administrative positions within the university hierarchy, students are more akin to the “dispersed local populations” within the social context of the university. Students are not remunerated (although sometimes they are awarded scholarships or bursaries), they receive rather than provide education (except for teaching done by graduate students), and once they finish their degrees their participation in university life usually ends (although they may continue some involvement as alumni). Thus, while students are in a sense the raison d’être of the university, they fulfill this role through their participation in the university community rather than in the institutional hierarchy itself.\(^23\)

This characterization of the university as doubly political — as a unified institution engaged with state power and as a variegated institution with diverse intrainstitutional interests — draws attention to the complex challenges of layered or “multilevel governance” (Piattoni, 2009; Vukasovic, 2014) inherent to the politics of higher education reform. Differentiating the university’s internal hierarchies allows consideration of how as a matter of everyday routine different factions within the university may conflict or ally with each other to achieve specific outcomes related to a wide variety of issues such as curriculum development, academic freedom and integrity, tenure and promotion, faculty and staff compensation, and various issues affecting students. These internal dynamics in turn affect how (or if) the university acts as a coherent social institution, particularly as it engages with state power and demands from other social forces. The manner in which groups within the university form or participate in advocacy coalitions, contribute or withdraw their support to certain causes, and establish alliances with groups outside of the university system shapes how governance and authority structures interact.

\(^22\) The French Grandes Ecoles are exceptions. These elite non-university higher education institutions were established by the state and treat students as future civil servants, providing them with a modest salary for the duration of their programs.

\(^23\) In other ways, students are quite different from the “dispersed local populations” subject to state power, for they are self-selecting, active participants that may easily opt out or “exit” (Hirschman, 1970) from the university in its entirety.
to produce the positive-sum, negative-sum, or zero-sum outcomes described earlier in this chapter. In the following section, I explore how the key power resources of autonomy and capacity shape how these actors relate to one another in the context of contentious higher educational politics.

**Autonomy and Capacity in State-University Relations**

As in the context of state-society relations more generally, the outcomes of particular engagements between states and universities vary according to the existing balance of institutional power. Higher education scholars have produced an extensive, well-developed body of literature on university autonomy, albeit one that is so diverse that some have criticized it for advancing “hopelessly incomplete” parochial definitions that “lead to conceptual fuzziness, faulty empirical assessments of degrees of autonomy, and a void in valid comparative analysis” (Levy, 1980, pp. 2-3). In its most basic form university autonomy is “that condition which permits an institution of higher education to govern itself without external interference” (De Groof et al., 1998, p. 75), a matter of authority and the power to make independent decisions about institutional governance, the right to endorse or promote principles or values, and the obligation “to assume full responsibility for decisions taken and the possible external effects of these decisions” (Nyborn, 2007). University autonomy is not just a status or an attribute but a source of institutional power, a force that shapes patterns of domination and accommodation throughout the educational arena.

Three basic levels of analysis can be distinguished in the study of university autonomy. Many scholars focus on autonomy at a macroscopic level, for example in the context of globalization and internationalization, the marketization of the international political economy, and the increasing importance of regional governance bodies (De Groof et al., 1998; Dobbins,
2011). Others adopt a microscopic or intranstitutional emphasis by exploring the extent to which various actors within the university operate autonomously from each other in the context of program development, curricula design, and institutional directives around teaching and research (Levy, 1980; Ordorika, 2003; Nyborn, 2007). An intermediary third approach, and the one I take up here because of its excellent theoretical fit with the state-in-society paradigm, focuses on domestic contexts and the relationships between universities and national or subnational states, including issues such as systemic coordination, state supervision and oversight, and funding (Berdahl, 1971; Van de Graaff et al., 1978; Clark, 1983a; Wasser, 1995). From this perspective, university autonomy is so critical to the most basic parameters of higher education reform that one prominent scholar of higher education referred to it as nothing less than “the Ark of the Covenant in the relationship between the state and higher education” (Neave, 2012, p. 25).

There are several natural complementarities between the state-in-society paradigm and canonical scholarship on the question of university autonomy. Many authors discuss university autonomy as a relational, historically, and culturally determined property, not a binary attribute but rather a matter of degree or proximity to external forces. “Autonomy,” Nyborn (2007) writes, “is always historically situated and must be understood as a relative dimension with a crucial impact on the way higher education and research actually functions in a particular historical and societal set of circumstances” (p. 135). While the “external interference” referenced by De Groof et. al. once emanated primarily from religious or royal authority, the state is usually the primary exogenous force constraining university autonomy today (Jones et al., 2005). The infrastructural power of the modern state is such that autonomy is granted to universities, a concession rather than an inherent institutional or juridical right. What might be considered 'total autonomy,' whether in the form of full economic independence from the state or with respect to the right to
institutional self-governance, is an impossible ideal in the era of bureaucratic statehood because “all proposals when implemented appear to result in residual control by the state” (Wasser, 1995, p. 15).

This discussion of the limits of autonomy has important bearing on the classification of ‘autonomous universities.’ Autonomous universities are generally defined as those that are granted the constitutional right to self-governance and a concomitant “position of pre-eminence in the state’s legal structure”:

These constitutional university corporations are insulated to a large degree from the political entanglements of both the legislative and executive branches of state government. The full legal structure of this elevated position is not uniform among these ‘autonomous’ universities […] By having this separate constitutional recognition, these autonomous universities are subject only to laws that are promulgated for the general welfare of the state as a whole (Alexander and Alexander, 2010, p. 36).24

As Alexander and Alexander go on to note, “the problem, of course, lies in how broadly the courts will interpret ‘general welfare’ and how narrowly they will define the ‘internal workings’ of a university” (p. 37). This tension is the subject of Chapter 4, and one that is not necessary to explore in greater detail here. The key point is that even when universities are designated as autonomous institutions within a particular legal order, qualification regarding the boundaries of that autonomy always requires specification. Autonomy must be understood as inherently partial, neither totalizing nor dichotomous, and autonomous universities as institutions that remain tied to the state through a variety of formal and informal mechanisms.

Courts, policymakers, and scholars frequently disaggregate university autonomy into organizational, administrative, financial and academic dimensions. Organizational autonomy refers to the authority of a university governing body to determine matters of internal

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24 This definition stops short of noting that this insulation from "political entanglements" effectively invests the autonomous university with the power to make its own decisions, as discussed immediately below.
governance, such as the process of selecting, appointing, and dismissing executive authorities, and of determining long-term strategic objectives more generally. This is, in some ways, the most political of the dimensions as it directly involves the principles and methods by which the university’s government is shaped. For example, the scope of organizational autonomy determines whether the executive head (usually a rector, chancellor, or president) is elected by the university community itself or appointed by a state authority. Administrative autonomy regards the extent to which a university has the right to decide on issues such as salaries, dismissal and promotion. Financial autonomy relates to the right of a university to manage its own funds, and is typically assessed by examining the distributive arrangements held by the university and the state in the process of assigning resources. Finally, academic autonomy refers to “a university’s ability to decide on various academic issues, such as student admissions, academic content, quality assurance, the introduction of degree programmes and the language of instruction” (European University Association, 2013). Universities may be formally granted these dimensions of autonomy in law, or they may operate with de facto autonomy in some or all areas.

Drawing upon institutional autonomy may be an important way for universities to protect themselves against specific interventions by the state, but in cases where universities become active participants in political struggles, their institutional capacity can be a major determinant of academic autonomy is related to but distinct from academic freedom, “the freedom for individual academics to think and act within particular higher educational institutions, within the system of higher educational institutions, and within and between national societies […] without consequence that can do damage to their status” (Shils, 1991, p. 2). Whereas academic autonomy is principally concerned with the relationship between the state and the university process of making decisions about the relative authority of each institution, academic freedom concerns the intellectual space for individual scholars to carry out their roles without censure. Threats to academic freedom are not therefore necessarily threats to academic autonomy and vice versa; intra-university restrictions such as a chair’s intervention in an instructor’s course or professors who assess students’ work on ideological merit may infringe on academic freedom but do not inherently threaten the university’s authority to govern itself (Berdahl, 1971, pp. 7-10; Levy, 1980, p. 87; Neave, 2012, p. 28). Academic autonomy may help academic freedom flourish, and while the two may mutually enable each other, they are not interchangeable.
the extent to which they are able to mount effective and sustained challenges to state power. Whereas university autonomy has been so widely studied as to result in widespread definitional parochialism (Levy, 1980), however, the inverse is true for capacity: named as such, it is largely unrecognized as a critical resource in the study of state-university relations. Terms like ‘capacity building’ and ‘capacity development’ are mainly prevalent in scholarship about how to foster research and innovation linkages between institutions (Eisemon and Davis, 1992; Brehm and Lundin, 2012), the promotion of curriculum or program development (Haeffele, Hood, & Feldman, 2011), and the cultivation of public-private partnerships (Schiller and Brimble, 2009). These approaches refer to capacity as a matter of institutional performance rather than of institutional power vis-à-vis the state or other social forces, and are therefore insufficient when exploring higher education reform as a matter of state-society relations. As a result, consideration of the ways in which universities serve as a sort of “social infrastructure […] that can link social demands to state power and […] enhance the institutional capacity of the state to define and realize its goals” (Wang, 1999, p. 234) are underdeveloped.

As outlined above, material, organizational, and symbolic resources are the primary determinants of social forces' internal capacity (Migdal, 2001, p. 107). Material capacity in this context refers primarily to the fiscal resources that enable the administrative and pedagogical activities of the university, including but not limited to the compensation of staff, research and development support, the maintenance of infrastructure, service provision to students, and tuition subsidization. Universities typically receive funds via the state (the most significant source of revenue for most public universities), partnerships with industry or other corporate bodies, fundraising, and/or student fees. Material capacity can also refer to infrastructure including
university buildings, research and laboratory equipment, information technology, and library facilities.

Organizational capacity in the context of state-university relations and the politics of higher education reform refers to institutional cohesion, or the efficiency of vertical hierarchies and horizontal connective structures within and between universities. According to Tarrow (1998), “the most effective forms of organization are based on partly autonomous and contextually rooted local units linked by connective structures and coordinated by formal organizations” (p. 124). The inherently hierarchical structure of the university enables communication and action at each level of the institution, while lateral connective structures such as governing councils, faculty associations and student unions provide routine opportunities for communication and discussion about university affairs within a context of order, regularity, and structure (Levy, 1980; Ordorika, 2003). Additionally, interuniversity connections forged between universities, including through national university councils, rectors’ associations, faculty and student federations, serve similar purposes by linking institutions to each other and creating the potential for universities to form a class of powerful actors that can unite as an organizationally connected bloc.

Although capacity is most frequently connected to either material or organizational resources, the capabilities of social forces are also determined in part by “their adroitness in exploiting or generating symbols to which people develop strong attachments” (Migdal, 2001, p. 107). Scholars have acknowledged the ubiquitous and essential role of the symbolic in political affairs for decades, although seldom with explicit reference to institutional autonomy and capacity (Edelman, 1964; Geertz, 1973; Edelman, 1988; Kertzer, 1988; Hall, 1997; Fischer, 2013).

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26 Here, ‘lateral’ means situations where “partners are different levels of the hierarchy are integrated into the flows of communication” and where there is a “reciprocal exchange of information and advice rather than the mere transmission of decisions and instructions” (Matiaske, 2013, p. 11).
Yet symbols are perhaps some of the most significant immaterial sources of capacity available to organizations, for “rather little that is political involves the use of direct force, and, though material resources are crucial to the political process, even their distribution and use are largely shaped through symbolic means” (Kertzer, 1988, pp. 2-3). Distinguishing symbols such as university coats of arms, charters and hymns can be used to assert institutional identity, while drawing upon legacies of prior historical struggles can allow universities to develop interpretive frames that reinforce their role in economic development, political change, and national culture. Indeed, in many countries university autonomy itself is an incredibly powerful symbolic resource, a profoundly political symbol activated and mobilized in times of conflict, and a cultural beacon to which people proudly point and strive to protect as part of their national heritage (Neave, 2012). University autonomy is therefore not only a source of institutional power in and of itself, but can also be distilled into a form of symbolic capital that is manipulated by universities as they tangle with the state.

Although I have discussed autonomy and capacity as distinct resources, and have emphasized the theoretical importance of minding this distinction, in practice these two resources are usually closely entwined and often self-reinforcing. The material capacity of a given university is often contingent upon its financial autonomy (ownership status impacts how funds and infrastructure are allocated and used), for instance, while organizational cohesion is at least partly determined by the manner in which representatives for positions within the university hierarchy are chosen (election or appointment). Autonomy and capacity are therefore not simply relational in the sense of shaping how different organizations relate to each other, but also of how the different sources of power interact themselves. This is a major focus of the two empirical chapters that follow.

**Power and the Contentious Politics of Higher Education Reform**
Historically, at least in the context of the West, the prevalent dynamic between states and public universities has generally been one of recursive mutual empowerment, a fact that can largely be attributed to their interdependence in many matters of organization and administration. As noted above, public universities rely upon state funding and other forms of support to fulfill their educational mandates, and therefore have an interest in ensuring the state can draw upon sufficient professional and technical expertise to develop and implement good public policy. Although a capable state in this regard is no guarantee that funds will be allocated in a manner palatable to the universities, states that are rich, relatively efficient, and stable or peaceful generally provide better funding to their higher education systems. Likewise, states have a clear interest in ensuring that universities are engaged in effective, high quality teaching and research that will educate the population, contribute to the state’s infrastructural power, and produce an elite class. Higher educational attainment, as outlined above, is correlated to better national development outcomes and more agility in the international system (Hall and Soskice, 2003), and universities often act as important repositories of national history and culture.

Beyond issues of national development and cultural heritage, states also rely on universities to fulfill an important legitimation function. Unlike vocational colleges and technical institutes, which predominantly focus on training and skill development rather than comprehensive teaching and research, universities produce new knowledge, a crucial element in the distribution and legitimation of modern power. “Power legitimates both knowledge and the existing modes of knowledge production,” writes Hans Weiler (1996), “while knowledge is used to legitimize existing arrangements for the exercise of power” (p. 34). Knowledge is therefore deeply embedded in the recursive or mutually transformative dynamic between states and universities. The knowledge produced by universities is legitimized when it is selected, authorized and
reproduced by agents of the state, in state-funded institutions, and within the state’s legal, jurisdictional and territorial boundaries. This knowledge then legitimates the state, imbuing particular political arrangements and actors with authority that is deemed rightful and appropriate. The knowledge produced by universities, in other words, not only contributes to the education of the professional classes in ways that enhance material and organizational capacity, but also contributes to the image of the state as the “dominant and single centre of society” (Shils in Migdal, 2001, p. 16).

This generally positive-sum dynamic can be — and often has been — threatened by tensions that develop when reform is put on the political agenda. These tensions are often directly or indirectly related to the balance of state-university power, and have the potential to significantly disrupt recursive patterns of mutual accommodation if and when challengers decide to mobilize. One common source of conflict is the extent of social spending on university education. Public universities (as with public institutions more generally) often argue that the more funding they receive the better they will be able to fulfill their educational missions. Real or perceived austerity measures, whether as a result of changes in the political economy or government priorities (or both), may have important implications for educational accessibility, the quality of research and teaching, and labour peace. Universities may challenge states and governments, just as sectors within universities may challenge university authorities, by engaging in various forms of collective action such as strikes, work to rule campaigns, and appeals to other levels of government.

Changes in the distribution of institutional autonomy can also lead to protracted confrontation between states and universities. In a comparative historical view, government and state elites have used a variety of strategies to curtail university autonomy when universities
challenge political power (directly or indirectly) or fail to meet development priorities. In many cases, these efforts are part of larger attempts to centralize or concentrate political power in the executive branch. Common strategies to afford universities less autonomy relative to the state include attempts to align teaching and research with partisan goals, purging students and faculty on ideological grounds, extending political control over access to higher education, abolishing or restricting university self-government, and discouraging or restricting international networks among scholars (Connelly and Grüttner, 2005).

Sometimes conflicts between political power and universities also revolve around the issue of knowledge itself. This situation is perhaps most relevant in cases where education reform occurs within a larger context of significant political transition or change. In instances of structural revolution or regime change, for example, struggles over access to and the composition of knowledge can become highly politicized interactions that address basic and essential questions about justice, citizenship, and political power (Carnoy, 1990). Although these conflicts may not have immediate repercussions for the state insofar as its infrastructural power is concerned, accumulated grievances can sour accommodative arrangements and create negative-sum dynamics in the long term.27

Clashes between proponents and opponents of reform, whether sustained or episodic, raise the issues of when, why, and how actors mobilize to support or challenge policy initiatives. Unlike in the agenda-setting and design stages of reform, which are typically driven by state and/or government elites, mobilization during the adoption and implementation stages (especially when initiatives are highly visible to the public rather than bureaucratic; see Grindle and Thomas, 1991) is commonly triggered by “narrow and group-specific” concerns (Tarrow,

27 Universities, of course, can and do challenge states and governments in areas that have little to do with higher education in and of itself. As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, students in particular have often confronted political power in a variety of different circumstances. Here, I focus only on the issue of higher education reform.
1998, p. 144) rather than general complaints. Depending on the available material, organizational and symbolic resources at hand, actors both for and against reform may choose to mobilize in a variety of ways in addition to the withdrawal of labour cited above. Common strategies used in the course of collective action include the use of pre-existing organizational connections for explicitly political purposes, the formation or renewal of coalitions or alliances, the development or revitalization of collective identities, the advancement of interpretive frameworks, and direct action strategies such as violence, marches, sit-ins, and other forms of public protest (Tarrow, 1998; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). Such tactics can be used during state-university conflict but may also be employed when constituencies within the university are at loggerheads with each other.

Autonomy and capacity are the key power resources that shape how actors interact during contentious episodes, but mobilization is also affected by changes in the political opportunity structure, the “consistent — but not necessarily formal or permanent — dimensions of the political environment that provide motives for collective action by affecting people’s expectations for success of failure” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 76). Unlike questions of relative institutional strength and weakness, political opportunity attends to the perception of changes in the external environment rather than the power available within or to a particular organization. Changes in dimensions such as the composition of electoral alignments, the structure of political alliances, levels of access to political power, the cohesion of ruling elites, and the existence of sympathetic and influential allies may condition actors’ willingness to mobilize against political power (Tarrow, 1998; Giugni, 2004; Opp, 2009; Goodwin and Jasper, 2012). While Tarrow is clear that considerations of political opportunity “cannot compensate for long for weaknesses in cultural, ideological, and organizational resources” (p. 77), they must be considered “alongside”
these institutional resources when considering what triggers mobilization and shapes the strategies of engagement chosen by those for and against reform.

**Methodology and Research Design**

*The Puzzle: Explaining Limited Reform*

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss how the broad theoretical points raised above can be applied to the case of higher education reform in Venezuela during the two presidential administrations of Hugo Chávez. As first explained in the Introduction, the central puzzle of this dissertation is why Venezuelan state and government elites had fairly limited success in adopting and implementing higher education reform. Given the ostensible strength of the Venezuelan state, the progressive concentration and centralization of power in the executive, and the vocal but organizationally impotent political opposition, why was reform piecemeal? Based on the theoretical apparatus outlined above, I expect to find that 1) the state was able to successfully implement reforms only when its institutional autonomy and capacity were not matched or exceeded by the autonomy and capacity of oppositional actors within the university sector, and that 2) the ways in which autonomy and capacity interacted varied according to the stage of the reform process (agenda-setting, design, adoption, and implementation) and the type of reform (bureaucratic or legislative). With respect to bureaucratic initiatives, I expect to find that Bolivarian reformers were primarily enabled by state autonomy during the agenda-setting, design, and adoption stages, and that capacity was the truly essential resource during implementation. In contrast, given the more public character of legislative reform, I expect to find that whereas state autonomy remained important during the agenda-setting and design

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28 By adoption, I mean the approval of reform policies by legislative, executive, or bureaucratic power. By implementation, I mean the execution of the initiative to its intended end as defined by state and government elites.
stages, the distribution of organizational capacity vis-à-vis the state and oppositional universities were far more consequential during the adoption stage (and remained important, though not singularly so, during implementation).

To explore how autonomy and capacity condition the strategic choices of actors, I divide autonomy into two different components, the formal and the empirical. Indicators of formal autonomy include an organization’s recognized legal independence from external control or influence in matters of administration, organization and finances, or the “legally specified limits of political oversight” (Caughey et al., 2009, p. 12). This can include constitutional or legal guarantees that effectively invest the organization in question with the power to make its own decisions and pursue its own political goals. Indicators of empirical or “real world” autonomy include leadership independence as evidenced by whether positions are appointed by an external power, procedural recognition of a formal legal mandate as determined by evidence of where de facto decision-making power rests, and the organization’s overall power to act without extensive external constraints.

Capacity, as already noted, can also be divided into three components: the material, organizational, and symbolic. Material indicators include financial assets (expenditures and sources of income as projected in budgets and rendered in national accounts) and infrastructure (property ownership). Organizational capacity or institutional cohesion consists of vertical hierarchies and horizontal connective structures: vertical hierarchies within institutions, and horizontal or lateral connections to other institutions or groups such as civil society organizations (Tarrow, 1998, p. 123). This does not take into account decision-making authority (which are in the domain of autonomy) but rather the depth and breadth of the connections between groups, which I measure by looking at the manner in which hierarchies and connections are mobilized.
for political ends, the personalities making use of those resources, and the degree of coordination between formal and informal organizations.

Finally, to explore the symbolic capacities of the state and universities, I address the rituals, myths and other symbolically salient resources available to actors. In particular, I look for the interpretive frameworks developed and employed by different groups over the course of reform. While framing is predominantly discussed in the context of social movement organizations, public policy scholars have also taken to this “interpretive turn” and adapted key features to apply to the policymaking process for states and other institutions (Fischer, 2003). Collective actors advance “organizational frames” (Evans, 1997, p. 454) that are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford, 1988, p. 198). Organizations decide the particular content of these interpretive frames by trying to balance the responses of groups encountering the frames (allies, neutral parties, or opponents) with the opportunities and constraints of the organizational environment within which they operate. A university’s ability to marshal its symbolic resources in the course of political conflict can unite and mobilize, enabling and emboldening its members to come to its service.

In addition to the balance of power as determined by distributions of autonomy and capacity, I also consider the role of political opportunity. As described above, political opportunity structures are defined as “features of regimes and institutions (e.g., splits in the ruling class) that facilitate or inhibit a political actor’s collective action and to changes in those features” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 49). Such opportunities shape the possibilities for the introduction of reforms, as well for the emergence of contentious responses. Here, political opportunities emerge as a result of electoral cycles (proximity to presidential, legislative and gubernatorial elections) and
cycles of non-electoral contention, or phases of “heightened conflict across the social system” that include “intensified interactions between challengers and authorities” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 199). Because political opportunity refers to factors exogenous to dissenting organizations — in this case, the public universities — I consider these structures in relation to state elites but not actors within the universities.

Case Selection

Latin American public universities have been essential to the integration and legitimation of modern political systems for almost 470 years, variously enabling and challenging state power depending on their surrounding social, political and economic environments. Created to ensure the interests of the Catholic Church and the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns, the influence of the Enlightenment transformed the university into an autonomous political actor in its own right, a deeply politicized institution that functioned as a “combatant in the political arena” and which represented for many “the ideal republic, the image of what society ought to be” (de Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002, p. 473). The knowledge produced within these institutions bolstered the state by training its professional classes while simultaneously producing images of the state as an independent entity beholden to its new citizens. By the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the university’s role as a guarantor of secular, national, liberal, and eventually democratic ideals allowed it to assert more autonomy from the state and absorb more influence from society, responding to pressures from both (especially during the wave of military dictatorships that swept the region, where universities were sites of both terrible repression and staunch resistance) but subservient to neither, true occupants of the borderlands between state and society (Maier and Weatherhead, 1979; Torres and Puiggrós, 1997; de Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002; Bernasconi, 2008).
In the twenty-first century universities remain central actors in the drama of Latin American state-society relations, but their various roles are again shifting as they, like institutions of higher education across much of the world, must contend with a variety of economic, political and social challenges. The widespread adoption of neoliberal and decentralization policies after the 1980s debt crisis triggered an approach to educational policymaking "driven primarily and most significantly by an economic imperative to reduce aggregate social expenditures, whether as a matter of 'sound fiscal policy' or as conditions of structural adjustment programs and loans administered by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund designed primarily with debt servicing obligations in mind" (Davidson-Harden and Schugurensky, 2009, p. 16). In the context of higher education, the model of the university as an independent, internally democratic, publicly funded and socially transformative institution continues to be challenged by the penetration of market-based logics into institutions once relatively shielded from profit-making imperatives, the transnationalization and internationalization of flows of labour, capital and ideas, and a sense that the future of economic and social development rests not in industrial production but in economies of knowledge (Bloom, 2005; Currie and Newson, 1998; Rhoads and Torres, 2006; Spring, 2009). Because universities remain the “main source of knowledge production all over the region” (Arocena and Sutz, 2001, p. 1228) they are highly valued by national governments keen on achieving competitiveness in the new knowledge economies, but the traditional model of the Latin American public university is experiencing “a crisis of identity and legitimacy in the public sector” (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 33) as policymakers increasingly rely upon the private sector to provide university education.

With one of the oldest and largest systems of public university education in Latin America (de Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002, p. 473), Venezuela provides an ideal context to explore how
variations in the balance of autonomy and capacity shape the outcome of state-university relations. Unlike most other states in the region, such as Colombia and Chile, the country has what Geiger (1988) calls a “comprehensive public and peripheral private” sector where “the public sector is basically designed to fulfill all of society’s higher educational needs; but invariably certain tasks are neglected, thus leaving opportunities (if permitted by law) for private institutions” (p. 701). The Venezuelan state and public universities have typically empowered each other in the processes of economic modernization and political consolidation in a manner consistent with the recursive dynamics outlined earlier in this chapter. Particularly after democratization in 1958 the Venezuelan university system became “a central factor in government plans for development” (Lorey, 1992, p. 65) as government and state elites sought to reduce the country’s dependence on foreign experts in technical and management positions in the oil industry. Increased spending on higher education led to the expansion of the system and the enhancement of the state’s infrastructural power. At the same time, universities have also repeatedly and directly challenged state power in times of both dictatorship and democracy, most notably in 1928 and 1936 (student uprisings against dictator Juan Vicente Gómez), 1958 (the ousting of dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez), and 1968-70 (when students, professors and university authorities clashed with the democratic governments of presidents Leoni and Caldera over the issue of university autonomy). In these cases, the dynamic of mutual empowerment broke down, and the state and universities actively tried to undermine each other’s power.

In many ways the Chávez period (1999-2012) fits squarely within this historical pattern of state-university relations. As I detail in Chapter 2, the creation of new post-secondary institutions that were administratively and organizationally directed by the state, the use of

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29 Although Chávez remained in office until 2013, I focus only on the period between 1999 and 2012, the year of the last presidential election.
legislation to increase the state’s supervisory power of the public university system as a whole, and the role of oil wealth in shaping patterns of social spending are common historical threads. Universities remained important resources for the productive and professional sectors after Hugo Chávez was elected, even as the terms of engagement shifted, and the autonomous universities in particular continued to draw upon long histories as self-appointed (but widely recognized) guardians of national culture and democracy.

At the same time, there were several unprecedented shifts in the nature of state-university interactions between 1999 and 2012 that are deserving of attention. The articulation of a distinct project of ‘university transformation’ was a departure from previous reform efforts that were not framed in such grandiose terms, even if the goals of the initiatives were far-reaching. The precise cause of tensions over the higher education budget in general also shifted. Whereas universities’ protestations about insufficient funding between 1983 and 1999 correlated to a constant decline in oil prices and state revenue, their objections to austere spending during the Chávez period occurred alongside a spectacular oil boom that began in 2003. The substantial investment in non-university higher education programs like Mission Sucre highlights the state’s comparative wealth during this period, as does the state’s tendency to award a significant proportion of expenditures to universities through discretionary channels rather than via annual budgetary mechanisms. Finally, perhaps the most significant points of departure from the previous pattern of state-university relations were the interrelated processes of, first, expanding the boundaries of the definition of ‘university community,’ and second, the use of judicial sanction to attempt to ensure compliance from obstinate universities that refused to abide by the resulting legislative changes. Consideration of the Chávez period therefore provides an important corrective to scholarship that presents the era as a radical break from the past (for better or for worse), and
contributes to a better understanding of the ways in which state power has been repurposed and deployed in the university sector.

Within the Chávez period, I focus specifically on four state initiatives associated with the project of university transformation (see Table 1.1). First, I examine the expansion of the public university sector via the creation of higher education programs and institutions administered by the state. These initiatives, including the creation of two higher education Missions and 22 new public universities, almost exclusively reflected the ideological and pedagogical positions of the government (in discourse if not in practice). I refer to this case interchangeably as the expansion or universalization of higher education. The next three cases compare the three major efforts to organizationally and administratively restructure the basic institutional features of the country’s public university system through legislative reform: the 2001 Organic Education Law, the 2009 Organic Education Law, and the 2010 University Education Law. The 2001 bill, despite having been unanimously approved by the National Assembly on its first reading, was publicly scorned by president Chávez and fell off the legislative agenda shortly thereafter. The 2009 law, a much more ambitious (and controversial) proposal, was passed by the National Assembly and signed into law by the president in August 2009 but was not implemented within the autonomous universities. Finally, I examine the University Education Law, the sweeping bill that would explicitly make universities machines of socialist transformation. Passed by the National Assembly in December 2010, President Chávez vetoed the bill in January 2011. Taken together, these four cases cover the most significant attempts to reshape the Venezuelan higher education system between 1999 and 2012 and provide enough clear variation to warrant thorough comparative analysis.

Table 1.2. Outcomes of Bolivarian Reform Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adopted (legislature)</th>
<th>Adopted (executive)</th>
<th>Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universalization</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 Organic Education Law</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009 Organic Education Law</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 University Education Law</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Structured, Focused Comparison and Within-Case Analysis**

To account for the outcomes of these four cases I conduct a qualitative, multi-method comparative study. Some critics have argued that single or small-n case studies have minimal value, or even that they are “of no use” (see Dogal and Pelassy in Flyvbjerg, 2006, 1), because they are often descriptive, atheoretical, idiographic, and ungeneralizable. However, provided that the universe of cases, research objective and design, and variables are thoughtfully and clearly defined, and that the researcher takes special care to minimize bias and ensure reliability, such case studies can contribute to high levels of conceptual validity, are less likely to fall prey to conceptual stretching, can identify and falsify hypotheses, variables or causal mechanisms through the course of inductive data collection, and lend themselves to consideration of complex causal pathways that large-n statistical studies may gloss over (George and Smoke, 1974; Krepon and Caldwell, 1991; George and Bennett, 2005, 17-22).

In this research I primarily employ the comparative method of structured, focused comparison, which integrates principles from statistical research design and detailed qualitative inquiry. As per George and Bennett (2005), “the method is ‘structured’ in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research objective,” much as would be done in survey research, and “‘focused’ in that it deals only with certain aspects of the historical cases examined” rather than providing an exhaustive account of every aspect of an event or phenomenon (p. 67). In practice, this requires the identification of variables of theoretical interest followed by the formulation of broad but carefully crafted questions that are asked of each case in a systematic manner. That the questions are general but structured and carefully grounded in existing scholarship not only allows for the cases in this particular study to be carefully
compared, but also means that they can be adapted for use in other contexts. I ask the following questions of each case:

1. What were the defining ideational and institutional features of the reform initiative?
2. How did political elites and members of the higher education system perceive the initiative?
3. What were the formal and empirical boundaries of authority that separated universities and other higher education institutions from the state?
4. What material, organizational and symbolic resources were available to reform protagonists?
5. How were the power resources addressed in Questions 3 and 4 — autonomy and capacity — mobilized by protagonists at different stages of reform? What strategic choices did they make about the reform process based on the distribution of autonomy and capacity?
6. What was the nature of the political opportunity structure preceding and during the episode of contention?

Data Collection

The findings in this dissertation are based on evidence drawn from a variety of primary and secondary sources. Literature on the general political history of Venezuela and the development of state-university relations in the period since independence is crucial for understanding the background institutional and structural context, and is also essential for establishing the stakes of the contemporary conflict. At the same time, given the nature of this research the line between what constitutes primary and secondary sources can be difficult to draw, for Venezuelan academics’ accounts of higher education reform are intimately bound by the surrounding conditions of knowledge production. Some of the foremost experts on universities and the politics of university reform were themselves key actors in the dramas that unfolded during the period in question, authoring proposed legislation, participating in protests, and publishing academic books and articles in Venezuelan and international presses. This fact makes data triangulation especially important. Wherever appropriate and whenever possible I have corroborated information with additional sources (including the use of a database consisting of
articles about higher education reform from Venezuelan newspapers *El Universal* and *El Nacional* developed specifically for the purposes of this project).

Most of the original evidence in this project is drawn from a fieldwork trip to Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, between May and July of 2012. During this period I completed documentary and archival research at the National Library, the Library of the National Assembly, the libraries at the Central University of Venezuela and the Andrés Bello Catholic University, and the library of the Office of Planning for the University Sector (OPSU), the strategic planning body within the Ministry of Popular Power for University Education. At these institutions I was able to access academic work, governance regulations, executive decrees, draft legislation, laws, budgets, and statistical data. Additionally, I conducted a comprehensive search of the daily proceedings of the Official Gazette, the official government newspaper, from 2000 to 2012 for laws, decrees, agreements and appointments related to higher education and university transformation.

The findings of this project also draw heavily from 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with current or former students, professors, deans, and executive authorities at a total of six autonomous, experimental and private universities: the Central University of Venezuela (Capital District), the University of the East (Anzoátegui state), Simón Bolívar University (Miranda state), the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (Capital District), the Metropolitan University (Capital District), and Andrés Bello Catholic University (Capital District). Within this pool are representatives from faculty unions, student organizations, rectors’ associations, and a range of disciplines including economics, politics, chemistry, engineering, immunology and law. The interviews were attained primarily through snowball sampling, were semi-structured in nature, and ranged in length from 30 minutes to almost three hours. I conducted half of the interviews in
English and half in a mix of English and Spanish, on several occasions with the assistance of an interpreter to ensure accuracy.

Although I did not deliberately employ ethnographic methods beyond taking daily field notes whilst in Caracas, my immersion in what was an entirely new cultural and geographic context did allow me to develop something of an ethnographic sensibility, which “can only be acquired by acting extensively with our research participants and their social world” (Jourde, 2009, p. 202), “especially if we don’t know much about those worlds or if we are operating on assumptions about, rather than real experience of them and their problems” (LeCompte, 2002, p. 296). My interpretation of higher education reform was heavily informed by my observations of and participation in the daily operational life of the Central University in particular, where events that struck me as extraordinary were viewed as anything but by veterans of the conflict. In addition to the skirmish at the Rectorate chronicled in the Introduction, on several occasions I had to interrupt library research and interviews in order to evacuate buildings due to low-intensity disruptions. I was also fortunate to observe two student-led public forums about university autonomy at the Central University, and to participate as students and professors from many different universities marched to the National Assembly to protest the financial arrangement between the state and the public universities.

As with any research design, this methodological framework does have limitations. The largest drawback is the asymmetrical interview sample, which is dominated by opponents of the government. Despite a number of telephone calls and visits to the Ministries of Education and University Education I was unable to speak with anyone formally connected to the current state apparatus, although one person I interviewed previously held a leadership position within the Office of Planning for the University Sector and was personal friends with two former higher
education ministers. This is not ideal. However, the tremendous volume of information produced by the state to promote and evaluate the project of university transformation, along with extensive media coverage of the episodes of contention, provide sufficient access to state narratives about the reforms and are further augmented by secondary sources.

With the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological framework of this study so established, I now turn to the question of university-state relations in Venezuela. In the following chapter I provide a broad overview of the development of the Venezuelan higher education system from its inception until the period immediately preceding the election of Hugo Chávez in December 1998. Chapters 3 and 4 then apply the specific research design to the cases described above.
Chapter 2

“We Rise to Greet the State, to Confront the State”: Venezuelan State-University Relations, 1696-1998

The history of the Venezuelan university is inseparable from the history of the Venezuelan state. For almost three centuries national universities have been embedded in a deeply recursive relationship with the state, first as part of the colonial apparatus and then as important republican institutions that contributed to economic development and democracy. Funded entirely by the state, these prestigious national institutions have produced some of the country’s greatest statesmen, intellectuals, scientists and artists (including over a dozen presidents from the Central University of Venezuela alone), trained an advanced technical workforce equipped for industrialization and the rapid exploitation of oil reserves, and educated an entire class of doctors, lawyers, economists and other professionals that contributed to the consolidation of the bureaucratic state. In recognition of and respect for their important role, the state in turn granted universities comprehensive powers to run their own affairs largely independent of the central state. This university autonomy is a prized attribute of Venezuela’s most important higher education institutions and an important cultural symbol.

To acknowledge the close connections between the university and the state is not to suggest that the relationship has been an easy one. In the struggle for power that is the essence of state-society relations, both have been locked in an almost constant tête-à-tête over issues ranging from academic freedom and the ability of universities to select their own authorities to the amount of resources allocated by state offices. In some cases they have even clashed over the legitimacy of the political regime itself; students and professors from the public universities were

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30 “We rise to greet the state, to confront the state” is taken from the penultimate line in David Wojnarowicz's Close to the knives: A memoir of disintegration (1991).
key participants in protests that destabilized or ousted dictators, while the national executive has repeatedly forced the universities to close in periods of autocracy and democracy alike. As this chapter demonstrates, the state-university relationship is not a story of symbiosis and fundamentally shared interests, but one characterized by enduring tensions about their respective obligations and the appropriate boundaries between the two. The dynamic, in other words, is about precisely those struggles for domination and accommodation constitutive of transformative state-society relations.

What follows is a historical survey of the development of the Venezuelan university and system of higher education from the colonial period to the end of the Fourth Republic in 1998. I begin this chapter by giving a brief overview of the emergence and role of the university in medieval and early modern Europe up to the beginning of the Peninsular War in 1808. The chapter then journeys across the Atlantic and considers the broader regional context before turning to the origins of the Venezuelan university and the national system of higher education in the colonial era (1696-1827). I proceed chronologically, considering the university in the process of early state consolidation (1827-1898), turn of the century dictatorship (1899-1935), early liberalization and the short-lived democratic junta (1936-1948), and military restoration (1948-1958). Finally, I turn to the Fourth Republic and Venezuela’s model democracy, examining the university in four periods: national democratization and university renovation (1958-1969), the oil boom and rapid university expansion (1970-1982), debt, state reform, and the privatization of higher education (1983-1993), and the search for a new model of state-university relations (1994-1998).

Three important dynamics emerge from this historical account of Venezuelan state-university relations. First, the expansion of Venezuela’s higher education system has always been
dependent upon a combination of development-oriented political will and the availability of material resources, particularly wealth derived from the oil industry. Second, university autonomy as a cultural frame and as a specific legal principle with institutional ramifications has been at the heart of many struggles between the university and the state since the early nineteenth century, when it was first introduced by independence leader Simón Bolívar. Finally, the record shows that university autonomy is not necessarily correlated to liberal or democratic regimes. Dimensions of autonomy were granted by several autocratic administrations, just as they were repeatedly violated even after being fully enshrined in law after democratization in 1958. Each of these dynamics influenced how the Chávez government conceptualized and responded to the project of higher education reform upon taking office in 1999.

**The Imperial and Colonial Background**

The modern Western university originated in medieval Europe, although ideas of liberal and higher education, much like Iberian culture more broadly, can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome (Wiarda, 2003; Fallis, 2007, p. 25). “Socrates,” however, “gave no diplomas” (Haskins, 1940, 3), and it was only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that corporate bodies characterized by instruction in Canon law and non-theological elements of religious administration began to emerge in Bologna (1088) and Paris (1150). The particular arrangements of imperial and religious power during this formative period had long-term consequences for the development of university governance norms and the concept of university autonomy. The *studia*, or the first universities, drew from the monastic “tradition of distance from the immediate demands of society and the pursuit of learning for its own sake,” the “pattern of a self-regulating community of masters [that conducted] the life of the community by internally agreed criteria” characteristic of guilds, and the “protection from interference by local ecclesiastical or political
authorities” in teaching matters granted by the Church (Hayhoe, 2015, p. 144). From their earliest emergence as discrete institutions, these universities had status as legal entities with considerable self-governing power in a context of increasingly institutionalized religiosity and imperialism.

Although the early universities originated as a product of institutional convergence rather than deliberate planning, their utility was nevertheless quickly recognized by medieval and early modern ecclesiastical and civil authorities who saw them as assets in the expansion and consolidation of political, religious and economic power (Fallis, 2007, p. 25). By the thirteenth century they crystallized into a general institutional model that provided post-secondary instruction in the arts, law, medicine and theology. At the end of the medieval period over eighty universities could be found throughout Europe, providing both professional training and liberal education to their students (Haskins, 1940, pp. 8-9; Fallis, 2007, p. 25). These universities, including Oxford, Cambridge, Toulouse and Montpellier, were important forces in the early modernization of political-territorial units in the French and British kingdoms, generating the human capital necessary for emergent bureaucracies and the extension of infrastructural power across Europe.

The first Spanish universities emerged against the backdrop of the Muslim Conquest and the Christian Reconquest, starting with the creation of the University of Salamanca in 1218. By the eighteenth century Spain had more universities than most other European powers (Thelin, 1982, p. 70; Anderson, 2004, p. 8). However, the modernizing influence of British and French universities was noticeably absent from their Spanish counterparts. Even though Spain had some of Europe’s first universities, very late industrialization, militaristic feudalism and preindustrial urbanization resulted in a corporatist, hierarchical and absolutist organization of Iberian political
and economic systems that was reproduced in the Spanish universities (Wiarda, 2003). The long-term effect was that Spanish universities, unlike their French and British counterparts, were bound to medieval patterns of organization that concentrated all authority regarding governance and academic matters in the Church and Crown. Rather than acting as an engine of imperial development and expansion, “the model of access, selection, finance, and certification which characterized the universities in imperial Spain ignored or thwarted talent which was a potential source of administrative expertise and service” (Thelin, 1982, p. 70). Very little effort on the part of the Crown went into creating medical or scientific programs that would have assisted modernization, development, and arguably the survival of the imperial order. Instead the universities of Salamanca, Alcalá and Valladolid “held a virtual monopoly on routes to prestigious professional careers in law and in civil and canon administrations” which favoured the sons of the nobility who sought secure positions in an imperial bureaucracy (Thelin, 1982, p. 70). This intentional reproduction of power precluded the participation of aspiring students not of the nobility, stifling the production and diffusion of knowledge outside of the more privileged classes.

As the eighteenth century turned into the nineteenth, the strength of the Spanish Empire began to dramatically decline due to the political instability of the Napoleonic Wars and mounting demands for independence from Latin American colonies. Napoleon invaded the Iberian Peninsula in 1808 and formally ended the Spanish Hapsburg monarchy by absorbing Spain into the First French Empire, leading to a period of radical change in the organization and purpose of Spanish universities. One of the most significant changes was the adoption of a new model of the university known as the Napoleonic model. Napoleon created a secular, centralized, hierarchical and compulsory system of university education that was intended to serve his
imperial monarchy in the processes of expansion and defence (Steger, 1979, p. 91). The first institutional manifestation of this new model, the Imperial University (founded in 1808), was “not really a university in the conventional sense but an overarching educational structure” organized by professional faculties and supervised by the central state (Levy, 1986, p. 19). Bureaucratic authority rested in the central ministries at the national level of government: professors and administrators worked as civil servants, and the ministry made decisions about curricula, degrees, and student admissions (Clark, 1983a, p. 126).

The state’s objective in assuming this activist position was to produce capable, trained professionals who would enter the bureaucracy and expand the scope of imperial power. The state sought to accomplish this by assuming the obligation and responsibility of making public education a “preferential activity of the state,” and in this role is often referred to as the Teaching State (Levy, 1986, p. 20). The university therefore became a branch of the modern secular state, a vehicle for development that was forced to operate within strict boundaries delimited by political (but no longer religious) authorities like never before. Because they were funded entirely by the state and focused on professional training for the purposes of state building, such institutions were and are often referred to as national universities (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 27).

The legacy of sluggish development during Spanish imperialism and, later, the centralizing mandate of the French, directly shaped the establishment and maturation of Latin American higher education institutions and systems. The region’s first universities were founded in the most important colonial centres during the period of mercantilist colonialism (Mahoney, 2010), and included the Dominican Republic (the University of Santo Domingo, founded in 1538), Perú (University of San Marcos, founded in 1551), and México (the Royal and Pontifical University, founded in 1553) (Levy, 1986, p. 28). From the beginning, such institutions were effectively
“mechanism[s] for the transfer of European (Spanish) culture and the political and social order to the colonies, as well as the catechisation of the natives and the spread of the Catholic faith” (de Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002, p. 471). Over the course of the next two centuries, ecclesiastical and royal authorities concerned with establishing and maintaining authority in the colonial holdings turned many seminaries into universities. These elites maintained the conservative organizational and intellectual characteristics of the Spanish universities upon which they were modelled. Organizationally, the universities were unitary institutions that answered directly to religious and imperial authorities. Intellectually and pedagogically, the “system of thought was closed, scholastic, and based on rote memorization of established, God-given truths” (Wiarda, 2003, p. 79). The colonial university was truly the product of its traditional and hierarchical Spanish genesis, “a sort of academic greenhouse reproducing the cultural climate of the Iberian Peninsula” (Steger, 1979, p. 88).

In the years leading up to Latin American independence, dynamics between the colonial authorities and a rapidly growing creole population became more contentious, and the role of the university in public life slowly began to change. The demands of nineteenth century independence movements were generally liberal and transformative but not revolutionary in the structural sense (Skocpol, 1979), and the university retained its position “as a plaything for an elite alienated on its own continent” (Steger, 1979, p. 88). Conflicts between Liberals and Conservatives about the extent to which the Church should have a role in the affairs of the state were often reflected in the universities. By and large, Liberals, heavily influenced by the American and French revolutions and the Enlightenment, sought state control of education and the abolition or at least marginalization of the Church from educational affairs, including the universities (Levy, 1986, p. 31). Conservatives, on the other hand, sought to preserve the
medieval and early modern Spanish patterns of hierarchical rule and clerical domination that were directly threatened by the Bourbon reforms. They tended to view universities as important cultural institutions that needed to be defended and preserved, not liberalized or modernized (Wiarda, 2003, p. 123). The relative distribution of power between Liberals and Conservatives after independence shaped state-university relations in each new national context.

Latin American Universities After Independence

Upon the political independence achieved by Liberals across Latin America, new state elites suddenly confronted with the titanic tasks of state-building and political consolidation quickly realized the utility of a state-centric model of the university in promoting political and economic goals of leaders. At the beginning of the nineteenth century many universities therefore adopted the Napoleonic model, or elements thereof, at the behest of new republican leaders. This was an important juncture as it marked a division between an emergent public and private sector. Whereas the fusion of power in the Church and Crown meant that “Spanish America’s colonial institutions of higher education were neither private nor public according to contemporary terminology” (Levy, 1986, p. 31), many universities in newly independent states underwent a transition whereby they became solely public institutions no longer subject to Church power. This pattern was aided by the idea of the Teaching State, a model of public education that “could provide liberal choices of values and professions, equity for those unable to purchase higher education, effectiveness for a progressive system, and freedom from religious dogma” (Levy, 1986, p. 70). Except in countries where Conservative (whether secular or religious) forces remained strong, such as Colombia and Guatemala, religious authorities and professors were replaced with secular figures, and theology faculties were replaced by those dedicated to civil law, effectively removing clerical figures from dominant positions within university
administration and teaching. Seminaries, of course, continued to function, but the universities generally formed national monopolies when it came to granting degrees and professional credentials. In this sense, universities became important vessels of infrastructural power, “the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout that realm” (Mann, 1984, p. 189), for the newly independent states.31

The transformation of Latin American universities into public institutions contributed not just to state-building by way of training new professional classes, but to nation-making as well. Newly beholden to republican leaders rather than the old colonial powers, they often became arbiters of symbolic power by helping to establish “the monopoly, not over violence or even over identity, but over the judgment of truth claims” (Centeno and Ferraro, 2013, p. 12). Symbolic power and nationalism are not synonymous,32 yet the universities’ status as institutions fundamentally concerned with ideas charged them with the dual function of promoting republican norms and nationalist visions of political organization. In a context where emergent political actors were multitudinous and vying for influence, universities became, in some fundamental though not exclusive sense, representatives of aspirations about “the ideal republic, the image of what society ought to be” (de Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002, p. 473). During this period they became not just public, but also, much like European universities following the Napoleonic reforms, genuinely national institutions.

The relationship of universities to Latin American state and clerical power may have changed after independence but a gulf remained between the elites’ commitment to liberalism and the

31 For related political science scholarship about the connections between state building, infrastructural power, role of primary public education in Latin America, see Soifer (2015).
32 Centeno and Ferraro argue that “symbolic power is not so much about the creation of a community but about the monopoly of legitimacy by the state apparatus […] This is not about identity but about the unquestionable allegiance to a set of institutions defined by and as the state; it is not about love of country but obedience to country. Nevertheless, nationalism provides the ideological linkages that serve to create collectives that view themselves as such and that provide the foundational legitimacy for state claims to power” (p. 13).
way the institutions functioned in practice. The relative vacuum of Church power was filled by state power, and organizational and academic structures within the universities remained quite similar to the colonial antecedents in that they were run by what essentially amounted to an academic oligarchy rooted in privileged social classes. Like the former colonial elites who sought to preserve their privileges, “the cátedra (chair) and lifetime tenure meant that professors began to regard the university as their feudal property” (de Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002, p. 473).

National presidents chose university authorities and the bureaucracy determined curricula and the allocation of professorial chairs. Empirical research remained subordinate to the pursuit of professional degrees, and the liberal arts, despite the growing prevalence of liberalism in society, were often absent from teaching programs (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 30).

It was only in the twentieth century, alongside the movement toward democracy in the region, that many public Latin American universities shifted towards a more independent relationship with the state. The emergence of the Córdoba Movement was a critical turning point. In 1918 a group of students from the University of Córdoba in Argentina engaged in a series of strikes and demonstrations while calling for the modernization and democratization of their university, which they perceived to be an anachronistic, exclusionary, deeply conservative institution that refused to adapt to rapidly changing demographic and economic realities (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 31). Students’ primary demands consisted of a tripartite governance structure known as cogobierno or co-government (the election of students, professors and sometimes alumni to faculty- and university-wide councils); university autonomy (the right of the university community to hold and honour these elections without intervention from the state or Church); curricular modernization that would incorporate more scientific inquiry; free tuition, and the removal of remaining Catholic instruction or supervision in faculties, courses and
programs aside from those related to theology or the study of religion (Molina, 2008, p. 134). Universities became as much about new forms of social participation as they were about the attainment of higher education.

The emergent Córdoba Movement soon stretched across the continent, reaching Chile in 1920, Mexico in 1921, Cuba in 1923, Colombia in 1924, and Perú in 1926 — but not, for reasons explained below, Venezuela (Molina, 2008, p. 134). The diffusion of the Córdoba framework and its combination with the Spanish-French hybrid that resulted from the Napoleonic reforms produced a general model of the public university unique to Latin America, one which assumed a primary (and political) role in social transformation and national development. Although the degree to which the Córdoba model was institutionalized depended upon pre-existing national constellations of institutional power and historical circumstance, it generally consisted of formal legal autonomy from the state (which was not always respected), democratic government, complete state funding, and a prohibition against state security forces entering university grounds unless invited by university authorities (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 32). Professors, students and alumni often split electoral power into equal thirds, while the central governing councils of many universities granted faculties the authority to elect their own deans. In this way autonomy became not just about the legal and procedural distance between the

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33 This push for student participation recalls the involvement of students in the internal affairs at the University of Salamanca in the thirteenth century. The historical record is not complete, but research indicates that faculty and students had access to different layers of power within the university. In this context, power was shared between students, who were represented by an elected rector and a council, and the cathedral authority (Cobban, 1975, p. 184). In the sixteenth century new statutes stipulated that the governing council of the university was to be composed of the rector, chancellor, fifty percent of the chairs, and eight students, and that it was the students who selected the chairs (Cobban, 1975, p. 184). Although the demands of the Córdoba students far exceeded the degree of student participation at the University of Salamanca, and while the experiences at one Spanish university cannot reasonably be generalized to such an extent that a direct line can be drawn across time and space, the historical similarities arguably constitute an element of institutional design and political participation that links the medieval Spanish university to its twentieth century Latin American counterpart.
university and state authorities, but about independent governance within the university as well (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 32).

The Córdoba Movement had two significant consequences for the relationship between the universities and the state. The first was that it stimulated a backlash from Conservative and religious interests. Levy (1986) argues that universities that resisted the Córdoba principles in whole or in part began to try to excuse themselves from public systems altogether, and sought to increase their legitimacy and leverage by forming alliances with the Church. Following 1918 a wave of new private Catholic universities spread across the continent, joining the few that already existed in places like Colombia (where the secular Externado University opened in 1886) and Chile (the Pontifical Catholic University in 1888). These institutions varied widely in organization and administration but lacked most of the key elements of the Córdoba model such as financial support from the state, guaranteed student representation in institutional governance, and university autonomy (Levy, 1986, p. 4). With the exception of Colombia, México and Costa Rica, the formation of private university sectors across Latin American states began with such private Catholic institutions, usually in the 1930s and 1940s (Levy, 1986, p. 36). The Córdoba reforms therefore indirectly caused the birth of the first wave of private university expansion in Latin America, effectively ending the postcolonial state monopoly on higher education.

The second significant effect of the Córdoba reforms was that they set the stage for the diffusion of this model of higher education governance during a period of significant institutional expansion in the mid-twentieth century. When governments undertook sustained efforts to expand access to higher education in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of rapid social change (including urbanization, population growth and increased access to secondary education), they did so by reproducing a model characterized by formal autonomy from the state, internal
democratic participation, and concern with responsiveness to the needs of society. Even when states sought to harness universities as engines of development rather than political emancipation, whether to escape from underdevelopment (as in the case of the dependentistas) or to become competitive actors in international capitalism (as desired by advocates of modernization theory), they did so with the organizational norms of the Córdoba reforms in mind (García Guadilla, 2008, p. 129).

The expansion of public higher education systems continued in most Latin American countries until the early 1970s, when much of the continent became engulfed by the rise of new authoritarian regimes beginning with the 1964 military coup that ousted Brazilian president João Goulart from office. The ensuing political violence and a general suspicion of the oppositional political power of universities put an end to the expansion of higher education and infringed upon the historic missions of many universities, resulting in temporary closures, military interventions and/or massacres in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and perhaps most infamously México in 1968, when the military first occupied the National Autonomous University of Mexico campus and then, a week later, opened fire on peaceful student protestors (Katsiaficas, 1987, p. 49). These political tensions between states and universities were then compounded by extensive economic strife during the debt crisis of 1980s (the ‘lost decade’). The OPEC oil embargoes in 1973-1974 and 1979-1981 led international financial institutions to lend extraordinary sums to industrializing middle-income Latin American states tempted by low interest rates, increasing existing regional external debt from $30 billion in 1970 to $240 billion in 1980 (Smith, 2005, p. 119). After the first oil crisis, stagnation, rising interest rates, declining value of traditional imports and shrinking per capita output undercut Latin America’s ability to service its debt, and when México, one of the region’s
largest borrowers, defaulted on its debt in August 1982, the region was thrown into severe crisis. The widespread adoption of restructuring programs devised by the International Monetary Fund led to further debt ($431 billion by 1990), more stagnation, rising unemployment, real wage decline, and a range of social effects including deepening inequality and poverty (Smith, 2005, p. 120).

The effects of the debt crisis on the provision of higher education and the relationship between Latin American states and public universities were dramatic. Overall public higher education expenditures grew by 36 percent between 1980 and 1990 but they did not keep pace with surging student enrolment and faculty growth. As a result, the rate of public expenditures per university student plunged (Arocena and Sutz, 2001, p. 1223). To bridge this funding gap, and encouraged by international lending institutions, many states attempted market-oriented solutions that diverged from the original Latin American model of the university institutionalized after the Córdoba Movement. Such measures included the introduction of tuition fees, the adoption of quality assurance protocols to ensure more fiscal accountability, the cultivation of ties with private firms and productive sectors, and the prioritization of research to a much greater degree than previously (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 28). States also encouraged the growth of the private university sector to relieve some of the burden on the public system, leading to another wave of growth at the expense of public dominance.

These economic reforms did not happen in a political vacuum. The devastation caused by the debt crisis contributed to the third wave of democratization that began in 1978 (Hagopian and Mainwaring, 2005). The process of regional democratization re-established the university as an important and independent social and political actor. Institutional reforms reintroduced principles like university autonomy, academic freedom, and mandatory minimum educational spending,
while the end of the Cold War extinguished many of the rebellious or revolutionary student groups that had previously been such strong challengers to the state (Balán, 2012, p. 742). In this more liberal political climate states and public universities rekindled respectful relationships, but this did not mean they were entirely free of conflict. No longer constrained by authoritarian repression, many of the reform initiatives faced “strong resistance from universities, students, staff and faculty unions, and local governments, either operating within the political process through congressional lobbying or through direct actions disruptive of university life” (Balán, 2012, p. 743). Variations in labour power, the strength of central governments, and the historical role of universities in public life led to wide variation in the extent to which such reforms were implemented, with states like Brazil and Chile achieving more far-reaching reform than places like and México and Bolivia.

By the new millennium, most of Latin America was on its way to recovering from the economic and political volatility that characterized the prior decades. The normalization of market economics and representative democracy created a new equilibrium, albeit one that was neither universally accepted nor completely institutionalized. Against a background of economic growth, globalization, and relative political stability, public universities started to become more integrated into new frontiers of trends in global higher education, especially by shifting away from an exclusive focus on teaching to institutional mandates that now emphasize research. In many cases, these institutions have followed the lead of American universities that emphasize public-private partnership, competitiveness, and commitment to economically salient research and development (Bernasconi, 2008; Balán, 2012). For example, many public universities stress the importance of contributing to the knowledge economy, adopt internationalization policies

34 The knowledge economy, sometimes extended to the knowledge society, refers to the “increasing importance attached to the production and use of knowledge as a wealth creator for nations” (Knight, 2005, p. 7).
that embed international or global dimensions into the purpose or delivery of higher education” (Knight, 2005, p. 13), and jockey for position in global institutional rankings (García Guadilla, 2002).

The increasing movement away from those elements of the Latin American model most affiliated with the Córdoba reforms and toward a more market-oriented or international vision of public higher education has not gone uncontested, nor have universities withdrawn from active confrontation with the state. In places like Colombia and Perú, states that have much stronger private higher education sectors than they do public, students, professors, and university authorities have mobilized in protest against the further privatization of public higher education. The most concerted efforts to revitalize public higher education, however, have come from governments associated with the Left Turn. In places like Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, political elites and grassroots supporters emphasize knowledge as a crucial source and symbol of political power, and universities as institutions with the potential to significantly assist the establishment of alternative models of sociopolitical relations based on participatory democracy and emergent forms of socialism (Herschberg and Rosen, 2006; Muhr and Verger, 2006). According to Peralta and Pezzuto (2014), however, these governments have been "unable to implement policies that increase access, reduce tuition costs, and diminish the role of private providers of higher education in the region" (p. 620). Only Venezuela, they argue, has been able to successfully increase educational accessibility. To understand the nature of this contemporary situation, considered in great detail in Chapters 3 and 4, the remainder of this chapter focuses on how Venezuelan universities and the higher education system have developed over the last three centuries, both in terms of their institutional form and the nature of their relationships with the central state.
The Venezuelan University and System of Higher Education

*The Colonial University: 1696-1827*

The foundations of the Venezuelan higher educational system began with the colonizing impulses of the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church. While “Venezuela stands out in Latin America for how little the colonial period and the nineteenth century shaped the modern scene” (Bejarano, 2011, p. 53), universities and their antecedents are some of the only institutions that have endured, more or less intact if not uninterrupted, three centuries of economic modernization and regime change. The creation of ecclesiastical schools in the sixteenth century was an important exception to peripheral colonial development in Venezuela.35 Because of the perception that there were few natural resources, the presence of a small and hierarchically organized indigenous population that made it difficult and unprofitable to engage in extensive slavery or labour exploitation, and the geographic difficulties of maintaining channels of commerce and communication with Spain, until the Bourbon reforms “the Venezuelan mainland settled back into relative self-sufficiency and attracted little attention from the Crown or the audiencia (court) at Santo Domingo which held nominal authority over Venezuela” (Ewell, 1984, p. 2; Ellner, 2008, p. 21; Mahoney, 2010). Insofar as they structured the daily activities of a large segment of colonial society, ecclesiastical schools and seminaries were some of the most important conduits of Hispanic and Catholic cultural influence.

The Crown’s first step toward establishing a higher education system in Venezuela occurred when Peruvian Bishop Antonio González de Acuña founded the Santa Rosa de Lima Seminary

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35 Mahoney (2010) distinguishes between mercantilist colonialism (1492-1700) and liberal colonialism (1700-1808). In the mercantilist period, Mahoney argues that Venezuela was a peripheral colony and therefore relatively unimportant to Spain. In the liberal period, it was semi-peripheral, and drew more attention from the colonial authorities. Soifer (2015) argues that by the beginning of the twentieth century, and because of the legacies of colonialism, the capacity of the Venezuelan state was “in the middle of the pack” (p. 14) compared to high capacity stages like Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, and their low capacity counterparts like Bolivia, Ecuador, and Perú.
In 1721 the Crown granted this seminary permission to become a university and a year later the Pope bestowed upon it the additional status of a pontifical institution. This university, the Royal and Pontifical University of Caracas, initially functioned very similarly to the University of Salamanca, a unitary institution organized and administered by papal authorities in the office of the Chancellor. Its curriculum consisted primarily of theology, philosophy, canon law and civil law, and other programs that would produce graduates who would be useful to the royal and religious power, reflecting the mission of the university as an institution designed to protect the colonial order (Moreno, 2008, p. 354). “Our colonial university,” wrote one Venezuelan professor of law, “was but a clumsy and blurred copy of the medieval Spanish university” (Cuenca, 1967, p. 29).

This major duty of the University of Caracas — to support the Crown and the Church — changed as the effects of the transfer of power from the Spanish Crown to the House of Bourbon eventually reached the University of Caracas. In 1737 a series of royal decrees intended to “neutralize the broad powers of the bishops” (Leal, 1981, p. 51) began to fracture the Church-Crown authority dyad in relation to higher education, and in 1784 Bourbon authorities implemented new statutes that allowed university rectors to be elected by a select group of professors and doctors. This change cauterized the ability of Church authorities to determine the leadership of the university and established an important degree of administrative independence from the colonial order as a whole (Morles et al., 2003, p. 7). It also transformed the intellectual foundation of the university from one based solely on religious doctrine to one that was more hospitable to the pursuit of other kinds of inquiry by giving professors the freedom to explore the

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36 The colonial powers did not establish an archdiocese in Venezuela until 1804, nearly three centuries after colonization (Ewell, 1984, p. 2), and well into the period of liberal colonialism (Mahoney, 2010). As a result, bishops from other jurisdictions sometimes stepped outside their formal boundaries in order to establish a royal and religious presence. Santa Rosa de Lima, or Saint Rose of Lima, was the first Latin American canonized saint. ‘Of Lima’ therefore refers to the saint, not the geographical location of the seminary.
ideas of Locke, Newton, Spinoza and other early modern thinkers. Venezuela’s other post-secondary institutions, its seminary colleges, were also affected by these reforms in that for the first time they were able to offer non-religious programs in civil law and philosophy (Morón, 1964, p. 83; Morles et al., 2003, p. 7; Rojas, 2005, p. 81).

As important as these mid-eighteenth century Bourbon reforms were to the reorganization of organizational power and knowledge in the University of Caracas, it is important not to overstate the degree to which authority shifted. The 1784 reforms may have severed the ties between the university and the Church, but the university’s relationship to the colonial state remained largely intact. The committee tasked with selecting university authorities was composed of members of the colonial elite and chose these authorities in their own image, effectively preserving and reproducing their own social status. To gain admission as students, candidates were required to demonstrate their upstanding moral character and commitment to Catholicism, and had to be wealthy, white, male, and the child of a Church-sanctioned marriage (Moreno, 2008, p. 354). These mechanisms to preserve privilege in turn affected the extent to which new liberal, modern, or scientific ideas were diffused within the university. Gil Fortoul argues that the University of Caracas harboured some of the more conservative practices and ideas of the colony, and that even though “its classrooms graduated important intellectual figures of [the] emancipation process, the university institution as a whole behaved more like a conservative structure of the metropolitan state and defender of the old monarchical regime” (Rojas, 2005, p. 82).  

In the decades leading up to independence, then, the Venezuelan university occupied a complicated station. On the one hand, its historical legacy as an essentially medieval institution

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37 In a particularly blistering critique of his time at the university José María Vargas, Rector of the UCV (1827-1829) and later President (1835-1836) underscores this point: “Without teachers, without methods, without useful establishments, without resources, I submit that the only thing learned in my country was studied and known imperfectly. It followed Latin Grammar, experimental philosophy without experiments […] Four years of medicine with a teacher inept in everything, without knowledge of anatomy, chemistry, botany” (Rojas, 2005, p. 82).
imported to Latin America during Spanish imperialism meant that conservative, monarchical and 
(at least until the Bourbon reforms) papal arrangements of power shaped its internal organization 
and purpose. On the other hand, and especially after the 1784 statutes that stripped the Church of 
the right to appoint university rectors, the university became a place where new and subversive 
ideas of independence, nationalism, and scientific inquiry gained some legitimacy. Even as the 
university continued to operate as an institution essentially accessible only to the privileged, the 
eighteenth century reforms indirectly set the stage for it to become an important republican 
institution upon political independence.

*The Republican University and Early State Consolidation: 1827-1898*

The curtain began to fall on the colonial period with the first declaration of Venezuelan 

independence in 1810 and the foundation of the First Republic (1810-1812). The War of 

Independence that followed in 1811 and the brief Second (1813-1814) and Third (1817-1819) 

Republics ensured that the University of Caracas and the University of the Andes (founded in 

1808 from the San Buenaventura Seminary, though it was not operational until 1832) remained 

the only institutions of their kind for almost eighty years, until the University of Zulia and the 

University of Carabobo were founded in 1891 and 1892. This slow development was largely due 

to the ongoing civil conflict between local political leaders and the weakness of the national 

government, which had neither the fiscal resources nor the political capital to create a strong 

central state let alone a *bona fide* university system (Soifer, 2015, p. 244).

Even before Venezuela gained its status as a sovereign state, however, the terms of national 

university-state relations were becoming established. In 1827 Simón Bolívar, independence 

leader and president of Gran Colombia, the republic that encompassed Venezuela until it became 

sovereign in 1830, issued a body of reform statutes (largely written by future president José
María Vargas) intended to move away from the colonial model and toward a more open and
diverse institution dedicated to scientific inquiry. Among other items, the statutes contained
provisions that renamed the University of Caracas the Central University of Venezuela (UCV),
gave the university ownership of its land and infrastructure, and removed all admission
requirements relating to race. The new republican university was organized according to a
somewhat decentralized structure (as opposed to the unitary organization of the colonial
university) that left the curricular decisions to faculties, and Bolívar instituted a process by which
university rectors were to be elected every three years, an important development that introduced
the general concept (though not the terminology) of university democracy. The effect of these
statutes was that the university gained specific forms of administrative, academic, organizational
and financial autonomy (Morles et al., 2003, p. 8; Moreno, 2008, p. 355). Although these
elements of autonomy continually shifted over the next two centuries (and foreshadowed some
of the elements of the Córdoba reforms almost a century later), Bolívar’s statutes are widely
considered to be the birth of university autonomy in Venezuela.38

This dynamic of trying to codify and promote the state’s role in higher education while
undermining the principle of university autonomy continued under President Antonio Guzmán
Blanco (1870-1887). Morón (1964) argues that under Guzmán "politics became the labour of
organization" (p. 176) and that he intended to modernize and strengthen the state by undertaking
ambitious public works projects, but others insist that Guzmán was more concerned with
establishing order, and that there "was no attempt to extend central authority or the institutions of
the central state through the national territory" (Soifer, 2015, p. 244). Guzmán's approach to
higher education reveals that, at least to a certain extent, both views have merit. Although he did

38 In 1843 university autonomy was further institutionalized in the Code of Public Instruction, Venezuela's first
comprehensive document governing public education. Its formalization was short-lived, however, as presidential
decrees in 1848 and 1863 returned the power to select authorities to the national executive.
not create any new universities, he oversaw extensive measures to lure professors from Europe
and elsewhere in Latin America in order to bolster the universities’ capacity for knowledge
production in service of his development projects (Morón, 1964, p. 200). To further enhance the
state’s pool of human capital Guzmán also declared that all qualified Venezuelans had the right
to attend national universities and colleges without incurring tuition fees, setting Venezuelan
expectations around free public higher education and establishing an important precedent for the
state's role in enhancing university capacity (Morón, 1964, p. 176; Morles et al., 2003, p. 8).

At the same time as he was trying to increase the capacity and accessibility of the national
universities, Guzmán remained suspicious of these institutions, recognizing them as potentially
destabilizing social forces that could challenge his personal power. Accordingly, he had no
compunction about intervening in the affairs of the Central University when he perceived it as
particularly threatening. In 1870 he closed the UCV on the grounds that it was a “nest of Goths
and oligarchs” intent on hampering his modernization efforts, in 1873 he removed its executive
authorities, and in 1883 he seized the landholdings that had been granted by Simón Bolívar in
1827 (Morles et al., 2003, p. 8). Guzmán sought to create a productive university sector, but one
that was ultimately beholden to executive power and which did not have recourse to formal
institutional autonomy. This strategy of limiting universities' autonomy while trying to promote
their utility for national development formed the core dynamic of successive Venezuelan
governments in the years to come.

Turn of the Century Dictatorship: 1899-1935

The military generals who steered Venezuela into the twentieth century promised much but
delivered little with respect to higher education. Presidents Cipriano Castro (1899-1908) and
Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935) “promoted far-reaching changes, the most important of which
was the creation of national institutions essential to stability and centralization” (Ellner, 2008, p. 34), but neglected the universities. Castro, distracted by multiple conflicts with foreign powers and an economic crisis that was at least partially his own doing, provided inadequate financial or infrastructural support to the universities, stimulating resentment from students and professors (Ewell, 1984, p. 43; Rojas, 2005, p. 90). In 1900 a group of students from the Central University publicly mocked Castro and the military generals running the country, leading the president to close that university in 1901 and the Universities of Zulia and Carabobo on similar grounds in 1904 (Zulia reopened only in 1946, and Carabobo in 1958) (Morón, 1964, p. 18; Rojas, 2005, p. 90). These contentious dynamics accelerated after Gómez overthrew Castro in 1908 and, emboldened by the rapid escalation of oil exploitation beginning in 1922, began to transform Venezuela’s economy from one based on the taxation of agricultural products to one based on petroleum exports (Coronil, 1997, p. 76; Tinker Salas, 2009, p. 6).

The state that Gómez inherited from Castro was so weak that “as a national institution […] its stability and legitimacy were constantly at risk” and it operated “as an unfulfilled project whose institutional form remained limited to localized sites of power with but partial domination over the nation’s territory and sway over its citizens” (Coronil, 1997, p. 76). As president, Gómez transformed Venezuela into a modern bureaucratic state with a national integrated territory, a standing army, and a unified population ready to embrace a slick transition to modernity. In the late 1920s, due to a deft combination of liberal oil policy and autocratic governance, Gómez accumulated massive revenues in a short time and was able to fund enormous developments in infrastructure and national defence. In this context of a weakly institutionalized state and skyrocketing oil revenues, power became increasingly concentrated in the president. With Gómez as its figurehead, the state became “elevated above society as a
transcendental agency, and its sacralized appearance was projected as the original source of these powers and the single expression of the national will” (Coronil, 1997, p. 84). The state was well on its way to becoming ‘magical.’

One outcome of this rapid development was widespread migration and accompanying social dislocation. Between 1908 and the time of his death the population of Venezuela increased by more than a third, while urban migration saw the population of Caracas alone more than double between 1920 and 1936. These demographic changes in turn increased demand (and need) for public services including higher education (Coronil, 1997, p. 12; Rojas, 2005, p. 92). The tension between such social consequences of petroleum-based industrialization and the lack of political reform, however, soon guided the university into an openly combative relationship with the state. Although Gómez found the anticlericalism of the Teaching State useful, he did not ensure that the Venezuelan state had enough authority or capacity to create a strong public education system (Albornoz, 2003, p. 106). Gómez paid little mind to the demands of the urban middle classes that were dissatisfied with his extractive and personalist rule, and the provision of higher education remained peripheral to national development. The significant expenditures required to make a robust university sector did not appeal to him, and he was suspicious of the liberal and democratic values increasingly promoted within these educational institutions.

The Gómez years are important to consider not only because of how the higher education system changed, but also because it was during this period that the Venezuelan university became truly politicized for the first time. In a response to growing social unrest that threatened his hold on power, and following the precedent set by Guzmán, Gómez dissolved the Central University’s student union, the General Association of Students, and then closed the university itself in 1912. This move had serious negative consequences for the state and for the president
himself. In Rojas’ view the closure was “a punitive measure without consideration of the fatal consequences that this act of the executive would mean for the development of science and culture in an agrarian, backward country that had barely left almost a century of civil wars, mutinies and coups” (2005, p. 90). More significant for the president were the unintended consequences of an incensed student body and, importantly, the professoriate. In response to the closure in 1912 the rector of the UCV attempted to resign from his post in protest and called upon the university community and the student union to stage a general strike against the government. Protests of students, professors and university authorities continued throughout 1912, 1913, 1914, 1917 and 1919, until the university finally reopened in 1920 (Rojas, 2005, p. 90). This reopening was short-lived, however, for Gómez closed it yet again from 1921-1922 in order to punish a group of students striking in solidarity with employees of the British-owned company Electric Trams of Caracas (Rojas, 2005, p. 91). Thus, while the Córdoba reforms were gaining traction in universities throughout much of the rest of Latin America, they had very little impact in Venezuela.

The university sector’s protests throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s reached a crescendo in February 1928 when the nascent Venezuelan student movement, composed primarily of individuals from the landed upper classes and commercial middle class (Rojas, 2005, p. 91), turned university ceremony into political theatre. In that year students re-established the General Association of Students as the Venezuelan Student Federation (FEV), with future Venezuelan president Raúl Leoni as its leader, and undertook a number of ostensibly cultural Student Week events that directly mobilized students against the government. The coronation ceremony for the new Student Queen at the National Pantheon provided a forum for student activists and future political leaders like Rómulo Betancourt (who in a fiery speech invoked Simón Bolivar as
liberator) to demand reforms to the political and economic systems and to condemn Gómez for letting Americans write Venezuela’s petroleum law (Morón, 1964, p. 194; Suárez Figueroa, 2007, pp. 28-30).

Gómez responded to the intransigent Student Week leaders with considerable repression, arresting and imprisoning 300 students outside of Caracas. An additional two hundred students were arrested shortly thereafter when they opted to “embarrass the regime by surrendering voluntarily to the police to share the same fate as the imprisoned students” (McBeth, 2008, p. 225). This did not have the effect Gómez wanted. Rather than stifling dissent, the protests spread to other segments of society, including dock workers, telephone service operators, employees of the Bank of Venezuela, and parents of the imprisoned. Eleven days after the first students were arrested, and understanding that the increasingly widespread public support for the students was “receiving the wholehearted approval of public opinion, [Gómez] was shrewd enough to see that he had gone too far” and released all but three of those involved in the initial Student Week demonstrations (McBeth, 2008, p. 226).

The release of the student activists and their return to Caracas as heroes marked an end to the first substantial episode of organized anti-government protest from the public university and civil society. Although the protests did not remove Gómez from power, there were three long-term effects that had significant bearing on state-university relations and the later democratization of the country. First, the students became collectively known as the Generation of 1928, an identifiable student movement memorialized in Venezuelan history as a powerful challenger to authoritarian rule. Second, university autonomy was mobilized as a resonant cultural symbol associated with freedom and democracy. University autonomy became not only a principle of institutional governance but also a symbolic resource in and of itself. Third, the frenetic activities
of students in the streets and crowded jail cells provided the initial organization for what became the twentieth century’s definitive political parties. Key figures from this student movement went on to found Acción Democrática (Raúl Leoni, Rómulo Gallegos and Rómulo Betancourt), the Communist Party of Venezuela (Gustavo Machado and Juan Bautista Fuenmayor), and the Democratic Republican Union (Jóvito Villalba and Isaac Pardo), three of the country’s most important political parties in the democratic era. As shown below, the students’ experience of political mobilization initiated what became a long tradition of individuals graduating from positions of student leadership to positions of formal political power and influence.

*Early Liberalization and the Trienio 1936-1948*

When Juan Vicente Gómez died in office December of 1935, he left a weakened university sector — only the Central University and the University of the Andes remained operational — and, like each of his predecessors, a significant disparity between supply and demand for education at all levels. Under the two generals who succeeded him, Eleazar López Contreras (1935-1941) and especially Isaías Medina Angarita (1941-1945), there was a “gradual extension of democratic liberties and the creation of institutions and formulation of policies designed to promote economic development and the general welfare” (Ellner, 2008, p. 39). For example, at the national policy level, the framework governing the universities was revised in the 1940 Education Law approved by López Contreras. While the issue of autonomy was not explicitly addressed, the law stipulated that the federal executive had the power to choose the top executive authorities of each university (Article 79), albeit under the recommendation of each university’s University Council. Students did not sit on these governing councils but were afforded representation at their faculty schools, the first time they held any formal power within the public universities. With respect to public funding, López Contreras and Medina limited investment to
the revitalization of existing infrastructure and ongoing projects such as the construction of what became the University City, the new main campus of the Central University, in 1941 (Móron, 1964, p. 213), but they did not promote any reforms that substantially increased the accessibility of university education.

When the Venezuelan military and Acción Democrática ousted Medina in 1945 and initiated a brief but significant period of democracy known as the Trienio, the overall state of education in Venezuela was still profoundly lacking. More than 65 percent of the population between the ages of 14 and 59 was completely illiterate and Venezuela’s classrooms were extremely overcrowded, with a total of only 55,000 seats for pupils throughout the country (Kolb, 1974, p. 37). In order to address these deficits the revolutionary junta’s most sweeping educational reforms during the Trienio period focused on public primary and secondary education. In particular, the Acción Democrática government sought to expand state regulation of public and private schools. In May 1946 president Betancourt issued Decree 321, which instituted a classification system for private institutions and created a complicated national system of exams and qualifications that were costlier and more difficult for students from private schools (Ewell, 1984, p. 104; Levine, 1973, pp. 70-78). The decree was interpreted by the private and Catholic education sectors, which believed that the family and Church should have dominion over all aspects of private education, as "the opening shot in a war of extermination against Catholic education" in a national context where the Church was already relatively weak (Levine, 1973, p. 3). Student strikes and protest from civil society groups combined with opposition from the social Christian party COPEI (Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee), which had formed only five months earlier, in January 1946, as well as opposition from within Acción Democrática itself (Ellner, 1992, p. 154). The strength of the opposition to the decree alarmed Betancourt, who backtracked
by publicly describing it as "the product of a disloyal machination by a group entrenched in the Ministry of Education" (Levine, 1973, p. 74), forcing the Minister of Education, Humberto García Arocha,\textsuperscript{39} to resign, and suspending the decree.

Disagreement over increasing state authority in educational affairs may have been a source of great contention in elementary and secondary schools, but the AD government fared much better in the higher education sector.\textsuperscript{40} Presidents Betancourt and then Gallegos, both members of the Generation of 1928, took the universities so seriously that they implemented a new Organic Statute of National Universities in 1946, a year before promulgating the country’s first democratic constitution in 1947. Acknowledging the need for a new state-university relationship, Decree 408 created a new National Universities Council that consisted of elected professorial and student representatives, university rectors, and the Minister of Education, and introduced the principle of \textit{cogobierno} within Venezuelan universities, giving students some representation in University Councils and faculty councils (even as the federal government retained the power of selecting and removing university authorities). This statute was in turn followed by the 1948 Organic Education Law, which institutionalized a Venezuelan version of the Teaching State that made education a basic public duty, marginalized the Church, and emphasized Venezuelan nationalism (Levine, 1973, pp. 66-67). The opposition to the 1948 Organic Education Law was similar to that engendered by Decree 321, but evaporated when Marcos Pérez Jiménez overthrew the AD government in November 1948.

Despite the short duration of the Trienio, this was a significant period of educational contention. Acción Democrática's initial foray into educational policymaking set the terms of the

\textsuperscript{39} Humberto García Arocha was the uncle of Cecilia García Arocha, who became the rector of the Central University of Venezuela (and a strong antagonist of the Chávez government) in 2008.

\textsuperscript{40} Venezuela's first Catholic university was created in 1953. Had there already been a strong private or Catholic higher education system, it is likely that the government would have experienced considerable resistance in this arena too.
debate, the trajectory of reform, and expectations about the role of the state in Venezuelan education, especially in relation to Catholic and conservative social forces. With respect to higher education in particular, the *Trienio* promoted a model of a Napoleonic university that focused on national economic and social development, and which revived the concept of the Teaching State first articulated in the Gómez years (Narváez, 2005; Castellano, 2011, p. 212).

The Acción Democrática government did not indelibly change the state's role in education during these three years, but it did foreshadow some of the major state-university dynamics that reemerged after democratization.

*Military Restoration and Marcos Pérez Jiménez: 1948-1958*

The changes presidents Betancourt and Gallegos made to the higher education system had minimal effects, for after three short years president Gallegos was overthrown and military rule recommenced. Presidents Carlos Delgado Chalbaud (1948-1950) and then Germán Suárez Flamerich (1950-1952) were forced to contend with a deeply frustrated population and, more specifically, university sector. This ire resulted in more protests from students, professors, and university authorities, especially from the Central University. The government’s response had three dimensions. First, state security forces engaged in straightforward acts of repression in order to quell protests in the streets. Second, the government began to infiltrate student organizations in an attempt to sabotage their capacity for mobilization. Third, president Suárez Flamerich, like Guzmán and Gómez before him, directly intervened in the affairs of the Central University. In August 1951 the president replaced the rector and vice-rector of the university with “known political conservatives” (Kolb, 1974, p. 98) that the government hoped would crack down on the campus activities of Acción Democrática. Two months later, in October, he formally stripped the institution of its autonomy and sent troops to close and occupy the campus.
(Alexander, 1964, p. 48). The UCV remained closed until January 1952, when Suárez Flamerich superseded the University Council and installed a Reform Council on the grounds that the university itself was not capable of quelling internal disturbances. The Reform Council reopened the university in February after suspending 130 students, but “frictions were so great that normal functioning was impossible,” leading the Reform Council to close the university until 1953 (Kolb, 1974, p. 99).

The state-university tensions evident during the Chalbaud and Suárez Flamerich administrations only intensified after Marcos Pérez Jiménez was fraudulently elected as provisional president in December 1952. Pérez Jiménez’s relationship with the universities mimicked Gómez’s strategy of engagement, undertaking large-scale public works projects made possible by Venezuela’s national resource wealth, but devoting little attention to the quality or accessibility of higher education. Instead, he directed his attentions to the extension of further state control over the universities through an effective combination of ongoing repression and the implementation of a new Universities Law in 1953. This law affected the state-university relationship in two major ways. First, it reasserted the sweeping powers of the state in relation to the organization and function of the universities. It did not contain any reference to university autonomy or cogovernment and specified that the national executive could select and remove the rector, vice-rector and secretary from the public universities (Article 4). The law also extended further state power over the academic affairs of universities, reserving for the state the right to select deans and directors of schools and research institutions (Article 5) and to create or modify new academic programs. Otherwise, the universities remained the same in their academic
character, with a focus on teaching rather than research, and a curriculum that emphasized professional careers in service of national development (Morles et al., 2003, p. 10).

The second significant change that resulted from the 1953 Universities Law was the codification of a legal and administrative framework that allowed the introduction of private universities. Unlike other Latin American states with fairly well developed private university systems that emerged in part due to intensive colonization (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, México, Perú), Venezuela did not yet have a private university sector. The 1953 law made no mention of guaranteed funding by the state nor of free access for students, removing higher education as an obligation of the state and effectively opening up the space for individuals authorized by the government to create denominational or non-denominational private universities (Article 51). Three months after the law came into effect, in July 1953, the Andrés Bello Catholic University and Santa María University (also Catholic) were founded in Caracas. This new wave of institutional development resulted in a dramatic surge in the number of students graduating from the private universities, reaching almost 20 percent of all Venezuelan university graduates by 1958 (Castellano, 2011, p. 216).

The emergence of a private higher education system may have alleviated some of the financial pressure on the Ministry of Education, but it also had the indirect effect of providing institutional cover for opponents of the regime. After President Suárez Flamerich closed the Central University in 1951 many of its displaced students, professors and even its rector sought refuge in the relative safety of Santa Maria University and, to a lesser extent, the Andrés Bello Catholic University (Rojas, 2005, p. 93). This migration between the universities in turn

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41 During the periods it remained open the UCV underwent some important expansion and diversification. Between 1952 and 1955 schools of Chemistry, Biology, Physics and Mathematics were established within the Faculty of Engineering, soon resulting in the creation of the Faculty of Science (Castellano, 2011, p. 218). In the social sciences, the School of Education was founded in 1954 alongside the National Pedagogical Institute that was openly hostile to the regime, and shortly thereafter the schools of International Studies, Statistics, Sociology and Anthropology were formed (Castellano, 2011, p. 219).
reinforced organizational connections between politically active individuals and multiplied the number of institutions acting as support bases for those agitating against the Pérez Jiménez government. In Caracas, students from Santa María University, the University of the Andes and the Andrés Bello Catholic University joined students from the Central University to brave severe repression in anti-regime mobilizations, resulting in a major student strike in 1957 that transformed into a general strike cutting across the professional, industrial, intellectual and working classes in 1958. In a futile attempt to placate the university community Pérez Jiménez appointed a scientist from the Central University as Minister of Education, and when this failed to stop the disruptions he suspended classes at the UCV. This state of affairs lasted a mere matter of weeks, for thirty years after the Generation of 1928 rose up against Juan Vicente Gómez, university students and professors helped the military and other civil society groups exile Marcos Pérez Jiménez to the Dominican Republic and return Acción Democrática to power (Kolb, 1974, pp. 174-175).

The downfall of Pérez Jiménez closed a long period of military rule in Venezuela. With the exception of the short-lived democratic junta in 1945-48, the country had been governed by autocrats — mostly military strongmen — for well over a century. During this long period of authoritarian instability the higher education system was subjected to competing currents. On the one hand, recognizing the importance of higher education for national development, state elites invested the necessary resources to create a national public university system, establishing four national universities between 1721 and 1891. The growth of the system was initially accompanied by the introduction of the principle of university autonomy in Simón Bolívar’s 1827 reform statutes, which paved the way for the evolution and institutionalization of the principles of university autonomy and cogobierno. On the other hand, authoritarian governments
frequently — and often correctly — perceived the universities and student movements as uncooperative and even hostile to the state, and attempted to undercut the power of these forces by reducing their capacity to mobilize or even carry out their academic missions. This was especially the case at the Central University, which was repeatedly closed or otherwise penalized by the national executive.

Upon democratization in 1958, the state's pattern of gradually expanding the university system while at the same time trying to maintain a certain degree of control over the universities could reasonably have been expected to change. The new political elites, so committed to the institutionalization of liberal democratic and social rights, had an opportunity to repair relations with the national universities and establish a more respectful relationship going forward. However, conflicts over university autonomy and the responsibility of the state in matters of public funding persisted well into the democratic era.


After president Marcos Pérez Jiménez was deposed Venezuela formally entered “the nation’s longest uninterrupted period of democratic politics and unhindered civilian rule in the twentieth century” (Levine, 2002, p. 248), a time often referred to as the Fourth Republic. As described in the Introduction, political power was consolidated in a foundational interparty pact between Democratic Action (Acción Democrática, or AD), the Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee (COPEI) and the Democratic Republican Union (Unión Republicana Democrática, or URD), resulting in an elite settlement designed to reinstate the liberal democratic system and encourage economic development (Buxton, 2001; Myers, 2004; Bejarano, 2011). The stability and endurance of the system anchored by the Pact of Punto Fijo

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42 Bejarano (2011) notes that in actuality there were a series of pacts formed between various political, social and economic actors. For simplicity’s sake I refer only to the Pact of Punto Fijo.
resulted in a competitive two-party representative populist\textsuperscript{43} democracy (\textit{puntofijismo}) which earned Venezuela the status of an exceptional democracy in a region largely governed by authoritarian leadership and dependent economic (under)development (Levine, 1973; McCoy and Myers, 2004; Ellner and Tinker Salas, 2007b). Until the 1980s Venezuela was characterized by a “strong currency, low inflation, sustained growth and a dominant role for the central state as regulator and distributor of oil revenues,” and “a centralized state, nationally focused institutions (including parties), a professional political class recruited and brought up nationally [and] a subordinated military” (Levine, 2002, pp. 250-251). In terms of social structure, this period led to Venezuelan “mass education, great social and geographic mobility, and the gradual homogenization of the country’s cultural and organizational life” (Levine, 2002, pp. 250-251).

Lorey (1992) argues that three dynamics characterized the development of the Venezuelan university system between 1958 and the early 1990s: an ideological linkage between universities and national aspirations, a need to diversify professional programs to serve economic development, and a persistent social demand for increased university education as a means to facilitate upward mobility. As demonstrated below, universities continued to assist processes of capitalist modernization by giving new priority to research and by making efforts to train more people in a shorter period of time for faster entry into labour markets. Universities also influenced the institutionalization of liberal democracy, although this did not necessarily mean that the universities and state had identical visions about what political order or the state-university relationship should look like. Particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, the state and public universities became mired in conflicts very much reminiscent of prior periods of military rule, with democratic presidents violating university autonomy by closing universities on the grounds

\textsuperscript{43} Ellner (2012) argues that because of Venezuela's growth and stability, the populism of \textit{puntofijismo} (and of Acción Democrática especially) has generally been viewed without the negative connotation usually attached to the concept, although he is also careful to acknowledge that "more recently it has come under heavy attack" (p. 133).
that they harboured belligerent forces and posed a threat to public order. Conflicts about autonomy and public funding continued into the 1980s and 1990s as the country’s economic and political systems collapsed, unsettling the state’s relationship with the universities and virtually every other publicly funded institution. In these decades autonomy became less about shielding the universities from state intrusion than ensuring that the state provided adequate financial support for them to fulfill their academic and social missions.

*Democratization and University Renovation: 1958-1969*

The government’s approach to higher education during the early period of the democratic transition was similar to the democratic junta’s strategy in 1945. Interim President Edgar Sanabria (1958-1959) was aware that a good relationship with the universities would legitimize the new regime and stimulate economic development, and accordingly sought to establish mutually agreeable terms of a new state-university relationship. In much the same way as Acción Democrática implemented the Universities Law before promulgating the constitution during the Trienio, Sanabria implemented a new Universities law in December 1958, well before the state promulgated a new constitution in 1961. This law, crafted in concert with a commission from the Central University, brought what Sanabria later described as “complete and authentic autonomy” to the public universities (although it did not designate them as autonomous institutions as such) (Castellano, 2011, p. 219). The law ensured that university authorities were to be elected by professors rather than selected by the national executive (Art. 29.3), that each institution’s University Council would have significantly more internal governance power (Art. 24), that academic freedom was protected (Art. 5), and that teaching was to be “inspired by a spirit of democracy, social justice and human solidarity” (Art. 4). The law also held that public universities would receive no less than 1.5 percent of the country’s national budget (Art. 11),
allowing the universities to engage in long-term planning (an important indicator of autonomy) with a reasonable sense of security.

The 1958 University Law’s provisions regarding university autonomy were unprecedented in the history of Venezuelan higher education, not only because of how much power they explicitly transferred to the universities, but because the law itself was part of a suite of institutional reforms that founded a new, democratic political order. Autonomy, and the rights of public universities more broadly, became foundational elements of higher education governance (even if the 1961 constitution made no mention of them). Of course, this is not to imply that the state withdrew all of its governing power over universities. The state retained the legal authority to enter campuses if its security forces were trying to prevent the commission of a crime or if the high court granted them access (Article 6), and it created another national supervisory body, the National Universities Council (CNU), chaired by the Minister of Education. Still, as the state sought to balance the right of university self-government with the creation of an organizational and institutional apparatus for higher education, the codification of key elements of autonomy almost immediately upon democratization highlighted a clear commitment to honouring the principle and the practice.

In addition to the new legal framework implemented with the 1958 Universities Law, the provisional junta immediately began to diversity and enhance the material capacity of the higher education sector. This was accomplished by dramatically increasing the amount and proportion of funding allocated to the public universities, part of the larger distributive political trend characteristic of the Punto Fijo regime until approximately 1975 (Myers, 2004, p. 26). As shown in Figure 2.1, government expenditures on education jumped a staggering 158.4 percent between the 1957-1958 school year and the 1959-1960 school year (UNESCO, 1959, p. 486).
As a result, secondary school enrolment grew from 21.1 percent in 1960 to 35.8 percent by 1970 (Levy, 1986, p. 42). This increase in turn created more demand for higher education. Universities, newly guaranteed a minimum of 1.5 percent of the national budget by the 1958 Universities Law, were guaranteed 77.5 million bolívares in the 1959-1960 year. The proportion of funding reserved for the Ministry of Education was second only to the amount channelled to the Ministry of Public Works, which itself was engaged in numerous construction and repair projects relating to universities. Aside from the immediate post-independence era, this remains the only period in which the university sector was not in want of increased funding (Fuenmayor, 2004).

The significant flow of resources to the educational system led to unprecedented expansion in the university sector. When Pérez Jiménez fell there were only five universities, three of which were public (the Central University, University of Zulia, University of the Andes) and two of which were private (Santa María University and the Andrés Bello Catholic University). Upon democratization the provisional government established the University of Carabobo in Valencia.
and authorized the creation of the University of the East, “a favourite project of the Betancourt regime,” in Anzoátegui (Alexander, 1964, p. 265). To meet the needs of government and industry these universities began to offer ‘short course’ degrees in areas like business and engineering, allowing students to complete their programs and enter the labour market in a compressed period of time (Lorey, 1992, p. 75). Other non-university post-secondary institutions like colleges and technological institutes served a similar purpose beginning with the Venezuelan Scientific Research Institute in 1959 and a polytechnic institute in Barquisimeto in 1962. As a result of these changes (and no doubt aided by the fact that students did not incur tuition fees) enrolment in Venezuelan universities increased immediately and dramatically: between the 1957-58 school year and the 1962-63 school year, enrolment in Venezuelan universities (public and private) increased from 10,270 to 35,000 students (Alexander, 1964, p. 266). The fields of health and law continued to dominate the career profiles of graduates, but the number of graduates from engineering and associated technical professions were also increasing rapidly (Lorey, 1992, p. 75).

Even in this hopeful period of early democracy and educational expansion the relationship between the state and the national universities was not without tension. One of the most immediate tasks of the Betancourt administration was to prevent a repeat of the coup that overthrew the first Acción Democrática regime in 1948, for while the Pact of Punto Fijo stabilized the party system, the military and a variety of leftist groups both stood out as potential challengers to the liberal democratic system. Ultimately Venezuelan political elites were able to achieve a democratic peace by successfully subordinating the military to civilian control and incorporating defeated guerrillas into the formal political system (Bejarano, 2011, p. 157). However, the initial marginalization of groups on the radical left bred resentment among those
who had collaborated with Acción Democrática to bring down Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Especially within the Central University, democratization was characterized by “bitter partisan politics among the student bodies of the universities” (Alexander, 1964, p. 267). Members of the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) felt betrayed by the AD administration for excluding them from the foundational pact (though not from political competition altogether), while disgruntled student members of AD left the party to form the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR). In 1960 the MIR and PCV, which had a strong base within the Central University, called for a popular insurrection and revolutionary general strike intended to bring down the Betancourt administration (Alexander, 1964, p. 267). By October and November of the same year student riots disrupted classes at the UCV and spread to other universities in Caracas and the University of Carabobo.

The calls to arms issued by guerrillas operating from within campus grounds put university authorities in a difficult position. The state’s restoration of university autonomy in 1958 — one of the first acts of the democratic regime — was a tremendously important symbolic and juridical achievement for the universities but also had the indirect effect of undermining democratic institutionalization. The principle of extraterritoriality contained in the 1958 Universities Law — the provision that state security forces would not enter campus grounds without explicit invitation from the rector — made the Central University a favoured environment for guerrillas to regroup, organize, and seek refuge, in a sense allowing them to use autonomy as a cloak to shield themselves from the state. University authorities, many of whom fought against Pérez Jiménez and other dictators and were part of a tradition that honoured political dissent, were loathe to forfeit autonomy by allowing state security forces to enter the

44 This notion of using autonomy as a way to 'hide' from opponents was revived after 1999, and is addressed in Chapter 4.
grounds to ferret out belligerents, particularly so soon after regaining that power. At the same time, these authorities did not want to shelter individuals pursuing ends anathema to the liberal democratic principles or the still fragile political system for which they had struggled.

Ultimately, it was the student body itself that began to undermine the position of guerrillas within the universities. The riots in 1960 stimulated a certain degree of backlash among many students, and in the winter of 1961 routine student elections at the national universities altered the terrain of university politics. At the universities in the interior of the country, student groups on the radical left were soundly defeated by their COPEI and AD competition in all universities except for the Central University, where student affairs remained led by a PCV-MIR coalition (Alexander, 1964, p. 268). Fearing an escalation of violence in response to the setbacks for the guerrillas, the government closed the UCV for a month prior to the 1963 general election, a contest the guerrillas urged the public to boycott but which had a turnout rate of over 90 percent.

As justified by President Betancourt,

> The generation to which I belong, the Generation of ‘28, underwent its apprenticeship of bars and prisons in the jails of Juan Vicente Gómez. And the student body which was the vanguard of the struggle against tyranny in December, 1957, and in the struggle of the 23rd of January, was being loyal to that historical tradition. But now that there functions in Venezuela a democratic regime, now that in our country we are working to bind up Venezuela’s wound left by the abominable past, it is inconceivable that there continue actively in the schoolrooms political manoeuvering, and even less that teaching posts be used for purposes of political proselytism, and a great deal less that entire faculties of the universities be controlled by minority political parties of a totalitarian philosophy which do not cater to Venezuelan interests but rather to the strategies and tactics of a foreign power (Alexander, 1964, p. 268).

The Central University reopened following the election that made Raúl Leoni of Acción Democrática president, but the precedent had been set for later closures of national universities by democratic governments. In December of 1966 Leoni, whose administration “assumed

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45 Since democratization, institutional student politics have been organized around slates that have historically explicitly or implicitly allied themselves with political parties.
positions that were on the left of the political spectrum” but who took a “hard-line approach to the nation’s leftist insurgency,” ordered it to close once more by referring to the need to defend national sovereignty and maintain democratic values (Ellner, 2008, p. 65). This time members of the government explicitly targeted university authorities, accusing them of deliberately harbouring guerrillas and “prostituting autonomy” for their own political ends (González Gamboa and Battaglini Suniaga, 2000, p. 40). On 15 December of 1966, claiming that the Central University authorities had lost control of the campus, the national executive suspended the constitutional guarantee of autonomy, assumed for itself guardianship of “administrative autonomy” and teaching activities, closed the residence of Rector Jesús María Bianco and several student residences allegedly housing guerrillas, and detained a number of students resisting the intervention (González Gamboa and Battaglini Suniaga, 2000, p. 40). The UCV remained closed for two months, during which time the government drafted a partial amendment to the Universities Law that specified the state’s responsibility for patrolling the areas surrounding the national universities in the interests of public order. The Leoni administration “tried to distinguish administrative and academic autonomy from the inviolability of university grounds” and claimed that in fact it was protecting university autonomy, arguing that maintaining public order within public institutions was nothing short of its duty (Levine, 1973, p. 198).

Leoni’s intervention in the UCV can be understood as part of the government’s larger pacification program, and as one of the last major efforts to extinguish threats to the democratic regime. Insofar as armed conflict between the state and guerrillas had essentially ceased by 1967 (Bejarano, 2011, p. 160), it can be considered successful. Yet while the intervention may have smothered most of the outstanding direct challenges to the democratic capitalist system, the
desire for a different kind of social and political system remained, and the focus of leftist students turned to the university itself. One consequence of the political turmoil was the emergence of the University Renovation Movement (*Renovación*) in the summer of 1968. Against the broader geopolitical backdrop of international student protests and the increasing popularity of dependency theory as a paradigm for understanding and explaining the uneven development of global capitalism, advocates of the Renovation Movement sought to harness the power of the university in order to change the conditions of Venezuelan society, reconceptualizing it as a transformative social force rather than an institution designed to serve the state bureaucracy and dependent capitalism (Albornoz, 2003, p. 159; Negrón Valera, 2007, p. 408; Castellano, 2011, p. 229). Although largely driven by students and discussed by academics in the context of the student movement, and while strongest within the Central University (Castellano and Medina Rubio, 2000, p. 15), professors, workers and administrative assistants also participated, especially those from the Faculties of Humanities, Economic and Social Sciences and the School of Sociology and Anthropology (Negrón Valera, 2007, pp. 409-410).

At least two distinct elements of the Renovation Movement can be identified. First, professors and students sought to challenge the positivist idea that knowledge is apolitical and delinked from systems of production. Proponents sought to make explicit the ways in which the material taught at universities supported liberal capitalism, and called for educators to be self-consciously aware about how an overwhelming focus on some disciplines and areas of knowledge (typically those beneficial to the oil industry) overwhelmed and marginalized others (Negrón Valera, 2007, p. 418). Advocates called for a sort of epistemic and pedagogical resistance to the hegemony of positivism, demanding that curricula in the national universities

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46 The influence of positivism on the organization of systems of knowledge and education in Latin America has been thoroughly detailed elsewhere (Wiarda, 2003).
demystify knowledge production by demonstrating how principles of progress, development and modernity have a political and economic function. For these individuals, the university would ideally continue to produce the professional classes but would also include and enrich other segments of Venezuelan culture and society (Castellano, 2011, p. 230). In this spirit, “questioning” emerged as a popular slogan and practice (Ellner, 1988, p. 50).

A second significant element of the Renovation Movement concerned the distribution of power within the universities in matters of institutional governance. Renewed interest in the principles of cogobierno and voting parity challenged the existing structure of representation that gave professors considerably more power relative to students, workers, and alumni on university governing boards and in university elections. Instead, many participants aligned with the Renovation Movement “sought to develop participatory organizational structures within the university, in part to resist the traditional elected institutions of the universities […] which had long served as direct proxies for the two-party system” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013, p. 111). For the former president of the Federation of University Centres at the UCV, a member and student representative of the Communist Party, this was a response to a crisis “which [the university] has to confront in the sense of strengthening and expanding its autonomous and democratic structures” (Ellner, 1988, p. 51). The PCV and MIR sought to extend similar representation to workers and administrative personnel, while others suggested replacing the governing bodies themselves with open assemblies (Ellner, 1988, p. 50; Albornoz, 2003, p. 151). Neither of these proposals gained substantial traction, but as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, opening up structures to workers and administrative personnel has remained an ongoing element in contemporary debates about university governance.
In reconceptualizing the university as a progressive social force and in its desire to change the distribution and structures of power within the university itself, the Renovation Movement recalls the spirit of the Córdoba Movement half a century earlier, which had largely bypassed Venezuela due to the universities’ ongoing struggles just to stay open under Juan Vicente Gómez. In terms of its actual direct effects on Venezuelan society, however, the Renovation Movement was minimally successful in the short term.\(^{47}\) With its loose organization and its more or less spontaneous character, the ideological divisions and sometimes violent conflicts between the on-campus arms of the PCV, MIR and COPEI created intractable factionalism and “seriously undermined the movement’s effectiveness” (Ellner, 1988, p. 50). The PCV advocated a more moderate and conciliatory agenda that focused primarily on the academic and intra-university issues raised by the Renovation Movement,\(^{48}\) but on several occasions — and despite the fact that armed insurrection had largely subsided by 1967 — the MIR took over parts of the UCV campus and remained openly committed to “taking the university to the streets, […] converting the universities into a support base for the guerrilla movement and other off-campus actions” (Ellner, 1988, p. 51).

Within the university, the Renovation Movement was moderately more successful. This was particularly the case with respect to proposals that had the support of sympathetic professors. At the UCV a number of curricular reforms allowed students more options with respect to their course selection (especially their electives), and study periods changed from being yearly to by

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\(^{47}\) One long-term effect was the increased importance given to the principle of extension, or the participation of the university in the broader community (Castellano and Medina Rubio, 2000, p. 18).

\(^{48}\) This disagreement also extended into the affairs of the PCV itself and sparked conflict between younger student leaders and the old guard. Whereas the young Communist leaders saw the Renovation as a much-needed reaction to entrenched institutional passivity and wanted to extend the principles of democracy to the internal organization of the PCV, more seasoned leaders understood it as emanating from the far left. Renovation-inspired proposals such as holding secret elections for the national leadership were viewed by the old guard as an affront to the essential features of Marxism, and the party head referred to its advocates as “anarchists, adventurists and nihilists” (Ellner, 1988, p. 52).
semester in order to give students a greater amount of flexibility (Castellano and Medina Rubio, 2000, p. 15; Morles et al., 2003, p. 10). In some schools the traditional emphasis on positivism and the professions shifted to make room for more of the students’ demands for critical and philosophical forms of inquiry, and the governance structure within the university expanded to give more weight to the opinions of students and alumni in matters such as selecting chairs and determining examination criteria (Castellano and Medina Rubio, 2000, p. 15).

Despite the inability of the Renovation to significantly shape the broader socio-political order, the fact that guerrillas remained active on university campuses captured the attention of the national government and generated uneasiness in the administration of Rafael Caldera, the moderate leader of COPEI elected in 1969. Upon taking office, Caldera, a lawyer and professor of political science at the Central University, had to contend with the calls for transformative action expressed by the Renovation Movement as well as the university sector’s structural inability to accommodate the public’s increasing demands for higher education. Additionally, he was faced with debate within his own administration between “those who wanted to open the University and create a dialogue on the educational problems and those who insisted on a full-scale housecleaning to remove incompetent officers and teachers” (Ewell, 1984, p. 172). In the end, president Caldera dealt with these very different pressures through a combination of, first, aggressive military interventions in some of the national universities, and second, the imposition of a new regulatory regime that formally adjusted the boundaries of university autonomy.

Caldera’s immediate response to the Renovation Movement was to borrow from the repertoire of past presidents and repress the opposition emanating from the Central University. On 30 October, 1969, no longer willing to tolerate the turbulence allegedly threatening to spill outside the university and destabilize the regime, Caldera launched a military campaign against
the Central University. Dubbed Operation Kangaroo, at least 2000 members of the National Guard, Metropolitan Police and Directorate of Intelligence Services and Prevention entered the campus in order to “evict groups that aim to turn the UCV into a headquarters of anarchy” (Castellano and Medina Rubio, 2000, p. 18; González Gamboa and Battaglini Suniaga, 2000, pp. 54-55; Moreno, 2008, p. 364). In this clear violation of university autonomy, ostensibly necessary to ensure continued peace, many students were hurt and several killed (Moreno, 2008, p. 358). Students and professors (including the UCV authorities that had been largely sympathetic to the Renovation Movement’s calls for intellectual renewal and internal reorganization) were incensed and continued to protest until it was reopened in February 1971 (Ellner, 1988, p. 167).49

Caldera’s second strategy for contending with the Renovation Movement was policy-driven. Seeking to prevent future destabilization, the government devoted its energies to updating the legal statutes governing university-state relations to permanently address what it perceived to be the underlying problem of university independence. In what Schulman (forthcoming) might call an "overstatement of harm," Ciccariello-Maher (2013) refers to this strategy as “a subtle and long-term policy of ethnic cleansing within the public university by limiting popular access and returning the institutions to their previous status as refuges for the most elite segments of society” (p. 112). In 1970 the Chamber of Deputies appointed a bipartisan AD-COPEI committee (lacking university representatives) to study and amend the 1958 Universities Law.50 In its explanation for the revision of the law the committee explained the position of the government regarding the issue of autonomy and state-university relations quite clearly:

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49 Similar confrontations between state security forces and members of the university community occurred at the Universities of Zulia and Los Andes, although there were fewer casualties.
50 This law was essentially based on two bylaws decreed in 1967 and 1969, and was followed by a further bylaw in 1971.
The Venezuelan university does not have the characteristics of European or North American universities. As a Latin American university, having gone through the Córdoba Reforms, it has an intense awareness of its political mission. The Commission has considered that this is one of the peculiarities of the Venezuelan university and that its essence must be respected because of its necessity for the democratic structure of our society and its desire for radical freedom of conscience. It has been more than ten years since the country has been ruled by governments of usurpers and autocrats, and the conception of the university in violent rebellion against the higher organs of the government of the Venezuelan nation has lost its basic justification. The circumstances under which the [1958] Universities Law was created, by a *de facto* government in the heat of the need to preserve the spirit of our universities against the threat of the return of antidemocratic groups, made the law such that the universities were given a defence from the state. This has led to the distortion of the idea of university autonomy, which under the constant pressure of violent groups with subversive ideologies, has become confused with the idea of sovereignty and the democratic state itself (Moreno, 2008, p. 358).

The justification of the commission echoes former president Betancourt’s stated reasons for closing the UCV in 1963: the principle of autonomy was once a way for the university to defend itself against the autocratic state, but, according to the government, was now being perverted by radical groups seeking to hide from authority and undermine the democratic system. For this reason, according to the Caldera administration, it was necessary to clarify and limit the principle of university autonomy.

The contents of the 1970 law changed the state-university relationship in three major ways (see Table 2.1). First, the law increased the state’s bureaucratic power over the national universities. President Caldera invested more organizational and administrative power in the National Universities Council (CNU, originally created in 1958) by arguing that in order to expand the higher education system there had to be a coordinating body that ensured a basic degree of standardization across all institutions. The major increase in students, professors and institutions in the 1960s created a situation of “chaotic growth, dispersion [and] duplication of efforts, and it was not accompanied by a harmonic organization of the higher education field”
In an attempt to rectify this, the CNU was tasked with overseeing the budgetary and functional operations of all universities and with directing a new technical advisory body called the Office of University Sector Planning (OPSU) staffed by individuals appointed by the national executive.

A second significant change introduced by the 1970 Universities Law was the institutionalization of the experimental university, an alternative to the national autonomous universities. This part of the law was a post hoc response to the state’s creation of the Lisandro Alvarado Central Western University in 1962 and Simón Bolívar Experimental University in 1967. Such new experimental universities were intended to “test new approaches and structures in higher education” (Art. 10), and were not granted any measure of autonomy from the state (although the law allowed for the possibility that they could gain such a status in the future). As such, they provided a public alternative to the autonomous universities and gave the state a greater degree of influence in the organization and administration of academic programs and governance. The legitimation of this type of institution set the stage for the next wave of university expansion that followed shortly thereafter.

The third significant element of the 1970 law was the redefinition of university autonomy. Article 9 disaggregated the ‘autonomy’ guaranteed in the 1958 law into four parts: organizational (the right to set its internal rules), administrative (the right to elect and name authorities and designate teaching personnel), academic (the right to plan, organize and create research programs and to support professors in their work) and financial (the right to organize and administer their property). These specifications can be read in at least two ways. One interpretation is that this detailed definition was an effort by the government to update the concept by codifying each of the four categories in order to secure precise elements of the universities’ independence. By
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<td>Major governing bodies (internal)</td>
<td>University Council consisting of rector, deans, and vice-rector. Student representation only on School Councils.</td>
<td>University Council.</td>
<td>Academic Council and Administrative Council. Decisions approved by state.</td>
<td>University Council consisting of rector, deans, three students, one alumnus and one representative from Ministry of Education.</td>
<td>University Council consisting of rector, vice-rectors, secretary, deans, five professors, three students, one alumnus, and representative from Ministry of Education.</td>
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<td>Major governing bodies (system)</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>National Universities Council.</td>
<td>National Universities Council presided over by Minister of Education.</td>
<td>National Universities Council presided over by Minister of Education.</td>
<td>National Universities Council presided over by Minister of Education.</td>
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<td>Public spending</td>
<td>Not specified.</td>
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Table 2.1. Comparison of Major Venezuelan Higher Education Laws, 1940-1970
clarifying its exact boundaries, the universities could theoretically have greater legal recourse to preserve their independent status. A less charitable reading, but one that is reinforced by the precedent set in 1966 when the Leoni administration tried to make a distinction between administrative and academic autonomy on the one hand, and the inviolability of campus grounds on the other, understands the 1970 law’s distinctions between types of autonomy was a way of fragmenting and ultimately weakening the universities’ claim to the traditional spirit and practice of autonomy. By creating the discursive and legal space for highly targeted state intervention, the state could theoretically restrict some forms of autonomy but claim that it was respecting others. In either interpretation, the new parameters meant that autonomy was no longer an expansive right characterized by the absence of the state, as in prior laws designed to protect the university from state power, but by the proximity of the state in four different arenas.

The approval of the new Universities Law in September 1970 triggered significant protest from the university sector, which viewed each of the three major changes as objectionable and further argued that there was not proper consultation with various university stakeholders during the design process. One month after the law was implemented the national executive closed the Central University yet again, this time seizing the adjacent Botanical Gardens that were technically part of, and managed by, the Central University. For Rector Jesús María Bianco, an advocate of the Renovation Movement and sharp critic of president Caldera, closing the Central University was a clear sign that the state had no intention of respecting university autonomy. Under strenuous objection to state intervention, Bianco resigned his position in protest. In his place the CNU appointed Rafael Clemente Arraiz as interim rector, eventually reopening the Central University in 1971 under new rector Oswaldo de Sola, a professor of geology. Regular university elections resumed in 1976.
The two years of chaos caused by the interventions in the UCV in 1969 and 1970 and the implementation of the 1970 Universities Law essentially extinguished the Renovation Movement, although from its embers emerged a new political party, the Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, or MAS). After forming in 1971 MAS quickly became the dominant party in the Venezuelan student movement, as “almost all the Communist youth leaders who controlled the student movement at the UCV and elsewhere in the 1960s passed over to MAS at the party’s birth in 1971” (Ellner, 1988, p. 6). For the university, the manner in which the Renovation Movement was snuffed out shattered any notions that democracy would bring a greater respect for university autonomy, a particularly stinging realization given the extent to which members of the political elite had themselves been members of the university community as students and as professors. For Caldera, the Law was a “pyrrhic victory” (Ewell, 1984, p. 172) in the sense that it seriously damaged any goodwill the universities may have had for his administration, but nevertheless culminated in a new legal framework that favoured greater state influence in the affairs of the national universities. This shifted the balance of power between the state and university sector considerably in favour of the former.

*The Oil Boom and Rapid Institutional Expansion: 1971-1982*

President Caldera’s interventions at the Central University and the implementation of the Universities Law were the last major episodes of contention regarding direct state interventions in the public university system until Hugo Chávez came to power, although tensions over the extent of public expenditures on higher education remained. Unlike other Latin American countries undergoing democratic breakdowns, conflict between the state, university administrations, and students ebbed as both the state and the university sector turned away from questioning the legitimacy of the political pact and toward how the universities could best serve
the development needs of the country.⁵¹ While the universities were still disdainful of the 1970 law, they accepted it as the new governing statute. Moreover, the Left was distracted with its own concerns about the ideal university-state relationship. MAS in particular was unwilling to defend the principle of absolute university autonomy, arguing that there could be cases where governments could legitimately intervene, such as in response to allegations of the misuse of public funds and on cutting down on the number of students repeating their studies. For the duration of the 1970s, freed from direct conflict with guerrillas and a rebellious university sector, the focus of the state and democratic government turned from managing political conflict to the expansion of the public higher education system (and the public sector more broadly) in service of capitalist modernization.

To the extent that it was a period of stability and expansion, the 1970s were the golden age of public higher education in Venezuela. The institutional context that Caldera established with the 1970 Universities Law, combined with the influx of oil revenue beginning in 1973, allowed his administration and especially that of his successor, Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1979), to pursue sweeping expansionist policies that increased the accessibility of public university education. The 1973 proclamation of an oil embargo by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries,⁵² the institutionalization of import substitution policies that led to substantial increases in GDP near the end of Caldera’s term, and the nationalization of the oil industry via the creation of Petroleum of Venezuela (PDVSA) in 1976 exponentially enriched the coffers of the Venezuelan state. “Venezuela received more money following the oil boom of the 1970s than it had received cumulatively throughout its entire previous history,” causing the size of the state

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⁵¹ This does not mean that the influence of the left in the university disappeared, but rather than it was in a state of internal flux. MIR and MAS remained popular in student politics, with MIR beating MAS in the 1978 student elections at the UCV, University of Carabobo and University of the Andes (Ellner, 1988, p. 119).

⁵² The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries consisted of member states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in addition to Egypt, Syria and Tunisia. Venezuela was an original founding member of OPEC in 1960.
bureaucracy to swell dramatically and enabling Pérez to oversee the creation of La Gran Venezuela (Grand Venezuela), a program based on massive public expenditures, the expansion of the public sector, increased social service provisions and the diversification of the export markets (Karl, 1997, pp. 123-126; Ellner, 2008, pp. 72). Like Juan Vicente Gómez before him, “the state, personified in Carlos Andrés Pérez as its most effective enchanter, induced a magical state of being that was the condition of the state’s appearance as the majestic agent of Venezuela’s transformation” (Coronil, 1997, p. 239).

Figure 2.2. Central Government Expenditures (millions bolívares), 1970-1980

In terms of total expenditures, the public university sector profited handsomely from this series of events. Between 1970 and 1980 education (at all levels) received more funding than any other spending arena, with the exception of 1972-1974 when there was “a short-run lag in the ability of the educational system to absorb its usual share of the national income because of a huge increase in oil profits” (Hanson, 1986, p. 158). Expenditures directed to public universities increased from 4.59 percent of the national budget to 6.51 percent in only five years (1975-1980), the vast majority of which were absorbed by the national autonomous universities.
By 1980, the five autonomous universities were the beneficiaries of 5.69 percent of the government’s total budgetary spending, with the remaining transfers going to technology institutes and colleges.

Increased public spending led to the rapid expansion of the state’s capacity to provide public higher education. This was accomplished primarily by creating new institutions of higher learning, including but not limited to universities. Between 1970 and 1982 the state created 10 experimental universities, 19 institutes of technology, and three colleges in 15 subnational states. This growth far outpaced that of private institutions and reaffirmed the primacy of the state, not the private sector, in matters of higher education. Beginning in 1974 the state also created a number of grant and loan programs (most notably the Ayacucho Plan) to provide opportunities for students to study abroad, especially in areas of science, technology, or other areas related to petroleum exploitation. The goal of such programs was to strengthen the productive sectors of the national workforce to help reduce Venezuela’s dependence on the foreign experts and technology (Morles et al., 2003, p. 11).

These expansionist policies resulted in a staggering increase in post-secondary enrolments. In the 1970-1971 school year approximately 85,000 Venezuelans attended higher education institutions. By the 1979-1980 school year that number swelled to almost 299,000 (Hanson, 1986, p. 159). If growing higher education enrolments are taken as an indicator of increased development, Venezuela appeared to be doing quite well. However, as in many other areas of the public sector, this rapid growth proved to be detrimental to the long-term sustainability of the university system. By 1980, the same year as a new Organic Education Law was passed, roughly 40 percent of the country’s total education budget went to higher education, “a proportion quite alarming to public officials because university students constituted only seven percent of the
total student population in that year” (Hanson, 1986, p. 159). This disparity resulted from a confluence of historical and institutional factors, including that the lack of tuition costs to students removed incentives for the completion of programs, the extensive social services for students and faculty, and a very generous pension system whereby tenured professors are eligible for retirement at full salary after 25 years of teaching (Hanson, 1986, p. 159; Ugalde, 2011, p. 58). The expansion of student enrolment was therefore soon outpaced by the growth of associated costs.

The extraordinary development of the university system significantly reduced the scope of the grievances levied by the universities against the state. The autonomous universities argued that despite the budgetary increases they remained insufficiently funded and that the redirection of funds to experimental universities came at their expense, but the identification of these structural problems did not lead to widespread challenges. The greater accessibility of university education narrowed the gap between supply and demand and eliminated social pressure for such reform, which in turn meant that state and government elites saw no reason to infiltrate or repress the public universities. The state-university relationship in this period was therefore far less contentious than in decades past.


The oil boom of the 1970s exacerbated a number of structural vulnerabilities in Venezuela’s political economy, including state elites’ heavy reliance on distributive policies, poor regulatory mechanisms, and the exclusion of the urban poor from the Punto Fijo system (Myers, 2004; Ellner, 2008). Falling interest rates in the late 1970s led to accelerated capital flight beginning in 1978, and when global oil prices began to fall in 1981 Venezuela was poised to enter a period of protracted economic contraction. This precarity intensified in February 1983 when president Luis
Herrera Campins (1979-1984) ordered a major currency devaluation and imposed foreign exchange controls, a day now infamously known as “Black Friday.” The resulting economic tailspin inherited by president Jaime Lusinchi (1984-1989), characterized by economic stagnation and soaring inflation, hit Venezuelans hard.

The tensions generated by the ongoing economic turmoil throughout the 1980s reached a boiling point in 1989. In December 1988 Carlos Andrés Pérez, who first held the office of the president between 1974 and 1979, was again elected to power, even as his Acción Democrática party incurred substantial congressional and state losses. In a move that surprised many given the interventionist commitments of his previous administration, three weeks after his inauguration Pérez introduced what his administration called “The Great Turnaround,” an austerity-driven policy package primarily based on macroeconomic stabilization (particularly the elimination of price distortions) and significant structural reforms including extensive trade liberalization, capital goods and labour market deregulation, the privatization of state enterprises including a number of banks and transportation and communication companies, and the elimination or restructuring of many of the social programs implemented after 1958 (Naím, 1993). Many of the men Pérez’s tasked with achieving this Turnaround were not from his Acción Democrática party, fraying intraparty relations and resulting in a case where “the government under a well-institutionalized ruling party ignored its electoral mandate” (Stokes, 2001, p. 114).

The social response to this policy turnaround was swift and harsh. Venezuelan students were among the first social sectors to challenge Pérez and repudiate the “shock treatment” he advocated (Ellner, 2008, p. 90). However, unlike earlier waves of contention, these students were not acting as agents of particular political parties, abandoning AD and COPEI as guarantors of a failing political system. Beginning with initial protests in 1983 and continuing through the rest of
the decade, students condemned the entrenched bipartisanship, corruption and elitism of the Punto Fijo system in its entirety (López Sanchez, 2006, p. 80). In 1987, students (as well as some professors and university authorities) went on a national hunger strike and engaged in massive street protests, leading the government to bring students in front of military tribunals and temporarily close campuses at the University of Zulia, the University of the East in Anzoátegui, the University of the Andes, and the Central University of Venezuela (Carvajal, 2011, pp. 31-32; Ciccariello-Maher, 2013). These demonstrations continued intermittently until 1988, creating a situation where by the time riots and looting swept through Caracas and other urban areas in February 1989, “the actions had already been legitimated in popular consciousness by the students who started these practices in 1987 and 1988” (López Sanchez, 2006, p. 80; Carvajal, 2011, p. 31). The state’s military response to protest, a week known as the Caracazo, left over 400 dead and thousands more injured (Canache, 2004, pp. 33-34).

This dramatic shift in the economic landscape and the ensuing social unrest had major repercussions for Venezuelan universities and the system of higher education beyond the national student movement. In 1984, the Lusinchi government formed the Presidential Commission for the Reform of the State (COPRE), a body primarily intended to discuss how decentralization and electoral reform might create a more modern, responsive state in a country where "centralism [was] a way of life" (Grindle, 2000, p. 40) and which Venezuelans colloquially referred to as a "partyocracy" or "partyarchy" dominated by AD and COPEI (Coppedge, 1994). Lusinchi’s successor, Carlos Andrés Pérez, elected in 1988, then spearheaded a number of administrative and political decentralization measures including the direct election of governors and mayors and a new law that increased the revenues and responsibilities of subnational governments (Grindle, 2000). In 1990 Congress passed the Organic Law of
Decentralization, which set the stage for the devolution of certain social policy responsibilities (including education) even as it retained the central state’s ability to oversee the decentralization process itself (Penfold Becerra, 2004). Decentralization continued, albeit at a slower pace, into the 1990s.

The implications of the wider push for decentralization for Venezuelan public education were far-reaching. Beginning in 1987 the COPRE released a series of reports highly critical of Venezuela’s educational system, arguing that “current educational performance is a barrier to economic development, and all levels of the education system are out of touch with national development” (Santiago Moreno, 2002, p. 4). For example, COPRE criticized the concept of the Teaching State, advocated for the “progressive decentralization of school system management” (COPRE, 1990, p. 109), and advised that that municipalities should become responsible for coordinating and guaranteeing the provision of education at the local level (COPRE, 1992; Morales & Núñez Muñoz, 2006). Newly elected subnational authorities began to pass legislation that transferred various educational responsibilities to states and municipalities, with most significant educational decentralization occurring in the states of Lara, Aragua, and Mérida (Penfold Becerra, 2004, p. 173).

The COPRE recommendations impacted higher education less than they did lower levels of education, largely because it was in the interest of the central state to maintain what limited authority it already had over the autonomous universities in particular. The COPRE did recognize the importance of the university to democracy and economic development, but argued that a different approach was required, and that there needed to be a way to create “the space for a new encounter between higher education, society and the state” based on decentralization,

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53 Decentralization in the educational context refers to “the transfer of responsibility for managing significant aspects of the education system from the national government to other levels” (Navarro, 2007, p. 390).
competition, quality and greater clarity in the financial relationship between the state and the public universities (COPRE, 1994, p. 458).

More importantly, the COPRE’s concerns about Venezuelan higher education resulted in a bicameral initiative to replace the 1970 Universities Law. In 1988 the commission presented a first draft to the legislature for discussion. Key points of debate focused on the definition and scope of autonomy, mechanisms for student admission, compensation for academic staff, and the extent to which universities were responsible for providing social services (meals, health care) to students and workers (Moreno, 2008, p. 386). This was the first time that the meaning of autonomy had been subject to review since 1970, and once more members of the university community expressed concern about how the state might compromise their right to self-governance. An El Universal editorial by the Professors’ Association at the Central University argued that passing the law would damage the relationship between the state and universities, that it violated various articles of the 1980 Organic Education Law, and that ongoing attempts at state reform in the name of improving the democratic system could not come at the expense of autonomy and democracy within the national universities (Moreno, 2008, p. 388). Even though Acción Democrática had a majority in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, as well as the support of many COPEI legislators, the government was wary enough of the outrage from the autonomous universities that it refrained from adopting the bill.

As policy-makers discussed state reform and higher education policy throughout the 1980s, the university sector was forced to adapt to the new economic reality with which it was immediately confronted. The first and most immediate consequence of the crisis was the volatility of fiscal transfers to the universities. Between 1975 and 1981 higher education
expenditures as a percent of the national budget consistently rose, but beginning in 1982 the transfers became more erratic, plunging in 1986 only to peak again in 1989.

Figure 2.3. National, Ministerial, and University Budgets, 1975-1998

This instability made it difficult for the relevant ministries and the universities to engage in any sort of long-term planning. The cumulative results included cutbacks to faculty and staff, a moratorium on library acquisitions, increasingly out-dated equipment and infrastructure, and the decimation of student scholarship and support programs (Albornoz, 1989; Fuenmayor, 1995; Santiago Moreno, 2002, p. 21). Labour disruptions within the universities led to a series of strikes, temporary work stoppages and marches between 1981 and 1988, the longest of which, a faculty strike in 1988, lasted five months (Hillman, 1994, p. 102). The state’s response to these strikes and other forms of protest was harsh. On several occasions it closed the institutions in anticipation of protest — the UCV was shuttered seven times in 1987 alone due to labour conflicts and state intervention — and when members of the university community did demonstrate, they were often met with violence by police and security forces (Hillman, 1994, p. 111). Once more, a democratic state violated university autonomy.
The period between 1983 and 1993 resulted in one additional outcome that further changed the provision of Venezuelan higher education. The combination of economic crisis, state reform efforts, and the turbulence within the public universities created an incentive structure for advocates of private higher education to expand their influence in the university system. Replicating a continental pattern of private growth as a result of (perceived) public failure (Levy, 1986), private institutions were able to promote themselves to parents and students as higher quality, stable alternatives to the public system, and to the state as unencumbered by restrictions on charging tuition or obtaining funding from the private sector. This new development was facilitated by an earlier strategic decision of the National Universities Council to promote the development and creation of private higher education institutions (Castellano, 1998, p. 41).

As a result of these changes, the growth of private universities and technological institutes far outpaced the public sector, a trend that was only amplified in the next decade. Between 1983 and 1998 the state created only one public university (the plans for which were already made prior to the economic collapse) and 13 technological institutes and colleges. In contrast, the private sector grew by 14 new universities and 29 technological institutes and colleges. Due to this new balance of public-private power, student enrolment in public universities dropped by 30 percent between 1980 and 1999, while enrolment in private universities increased by precisely the same proportion (Santiago Moreno, 2002, p. 86). This phase of privatization was therefore less about the hollowing out of public institutions than it was about the inability of the public sector as a whole to create a more appealing alternative to private actors willing to seize the opportunity for growth.
Although “at the onset of the debt crisis Venezuelan democracy appeared unshakable” (Stokes, 2001, p. 38), the economic crisis of the 1980s and the introduction of controversial neoliberal reforms soon led to an insurmountable political crisis in the 1990s. The legitimacy of the Punto Fijo regime was plummeting by the day, and in 1992 president Carlos Andrés Pérez became the victim of two coup attempts, one led by a young Hugo Chávez. Although neither of these actions were successful in removing him from office, they highlighted the deep social divisions within important Venezuelan institutions. These coup attempts were also precursors to the end of the political pact that had structured Venezuelan democracy for more than three decades. Pérez was impeached on corruption charges in May 1993, and former president Rafael Caldera stepped back into political competition not as a member of the party he helped found, COPEI, but as the leader of a new party, National Convergence (Convergencia).

As the leader of Convergencia, Caldera was re-elected in December 1993 after a campaign based largely on anti-neoliberal sentiment and the repudiation of Pérez’s policies (Stokes, 2001,
After eighteen months in power, however, he too embraced the neoliberal policies of his predecessor. In 1996 Caldera announced a new “Venezuela Agenda” program based on a $1.4 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund meant to stimulate the oil industry. The accompanying adjustment package required the privatization of national industries, the reorganization of the social security system, and the further liberalization of oil policy, none of which were consistent with his prior track record or campaign promises (Ellner, 2008, p. 104). Caldera’s return to power therefore shattered what remained of the Punto Fijo system: not only were AD and COPEI displaced from executive power for the first time since democratization, but his betrayal of his very own campaign promises irrevocably destroyed what remained of the legitimacy of the old political elite.

The fiscal and governance challenges faced by the public university sector led to a number of changes in the academic organization and practices in the 1990s. Universities, like many other public institutions in Venezuela and across Latin America in general, were in a state of great uncertainty about their role in national development and the future of their relationship to the state. Their position was paradoxical. As institutions of the public sector they were expected to find efficiencies in a context of austerity. At the same time, the state was cognizant of the fact that it depended upon universities to produce the elite and professional classes that could help the country adapt in a time of crisis, and continued to prioritize investment in public universities to the extent possible given the structural constraints at hand. It was therefore in the interest of the state and the universities to achieve some sort of new and mutually agreeable equilibrium.

The state’s approach to university reform began with additional attempts to implement new legislation. The COPRE indictments and legislative initiatives that began in the 1980s led to three more (ultimately unsuccessful) attempts to reform the legal framework of the universities.
In 1994 another bicameral and bipartisan commission tasked with reforming the higher education system introduced a new bill. In this version, universities were divided into autonomous and semi-autonomous classes, with the degree of autonomy in the latter type to be determined by a new National Higher Education Council on a case by case basis (Morles et al., 2003, p. 389). The proposed law also scaled back the state’s responsibility for ensuring free access to university education and to the material wellbeing of members of the university community. Although the bill preserved universal access in principle, it introduced tuition fees for financially privileged students, those previously educated in the private system, those studying for a second career, or those pursuing graduate degrees (Art. 10). Similarly, the range of free services previously offered to all registered university students became available only to low-income students, a significant change to the expansive entitlements heretofore enjoyed by all Venezuelan undergraduates by virtue of their registration at public universities (Art. 11).

As in the 1988 attempt to pass new legislation, the oppositional response from the national universities was considerable. Middle class students, professors and authorities demonstrated against the proposal (including, on one occasion, students stripping and painting themselves blue), claiming that the introduction of fees and the restriction of services based on income violated the legal right to universal education even as it concentrated state resources on the provision of enhanced assistance to poor Venezuelans who needed it most. In a country where free higher education was a source of national pride, this change threatened the interests of a middle class that felt entitled to universal post-secondary education and challenged the very model of public higher education that had defined the Venezuelan system since the Renovation Movement of the 1960s.
As a result of the ensuing protests, the government backed down once more (Moreno, 2008, p. 370). Subsequent legislative proposals in 1997 and 1998 were similarly ill-received and also failed. Still, these initiatives marked an important new phase in the state-university relationship because they revived the legal construction of university autonomy as a point of contention between the state and university sector, and in so doing changed the terms of the debate: whereas previous state-university conflicts revolved around the state’s intervention in the governing affairs of public universities, these universities now objected to the new higher education bills on the grounds that the state recused itself from university affairs too much and made universities less autonomous from market demands (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 38). The state had always been very intimately partnered with the public universities, and its deliberate retrenchment in matters of tuition and student support — longstanding elements of university governance — was profoundly unnerving for institutions fully funded by national budgets. Whereas privatization in the 1980s consisted of the proliferation of new private institutions, privatization in the 1990s was frequently framed as an assault on the public character of Venezuela’s national universities.

The universities themselves responded to direct and indirect pressures to reform by searching for a new institutional model suited to the changing circumstances. While it did not abandon the original Latin American model — a hybrid of the Napoleonic model and the Córdoba model that emerged after 1918 — it did deliberately shift its priorities away from teaching and social participation to research, innovation, and integration in the global system. The state assisted this transition by encouraging a research boom with the creation of a Program of Researcher Promotion in 1990, a program that awarded professors financial bonuses based on research productivity (Ellner, 2008, p. 86). Universities also began to reap the dividends of the Ayacucho Plan as scholars returned to Venezuela after studying at large American and French research
universities. Even in a context where most growth was in the private higher education sector (Holm-Nielsen et al, 2005, p. 42) these factors allowed the public universities to remain the primary producers of national research despite the economic and social upheaval (Fuenmayor, 1995).

Venezuelan universities’ attempts to come to terms with declining subsidization, the introduction of performance-based funding, and the development of an international knowledge economy meant that some of the key elements of the Córdoba reforms, including the focus on teaching and the emphasis on social participation, began to erode. In the tense political climate of the late 1990s, tensions over higher education threatened to erupt into much larger conflicts that would further destabilize the precarious balance of power between the state and university sector. At the same time, Venezuela managed to retain much of the Latin American model of the university to a greater degree than other countries facing similar pressures. For example, the practices of cogobierno and university democracy were abolished in Chile, while universities in Argentina and Brazil have concentrated more electoral power in faculty (Bernasconi, 2008, p. 45). These features remained intact in Venezuela’s national universities despite successive attempts at reform and restructuring.

Ultimately, the blows to the political pact, economic system and social structure that caused scholars to bestow upon Venezuela the status of an exceptional middle income democracy proved to be unsalvageable, and the country’s crisis deepened. The 1998 presidential campaign was a critical juncture in the country’s political history. Voters, feeling betrayed by neoliberal shifts that characterized the second administrations of Pérez and Caldera alike, and disenchanted with the party system more generally, turned to two anti-party candidates: Henrique Salas Romer, a former member of COPEI, and Hugo Chávez Frías, a former mid-ranking military
officer and leader of the Fifth Republic Movement party (MVR). Chávez was elected president in December 1998 — with considerable faculty and student support from many within the public universities — and inaugurated in February 1999. With this, not only did a new political era begin but so too did a new phase in state-university relations.

Conclusion

This history of Venezuelan state-university relations highlights the ways in which the country’s national public universities have been at the forefront of centuries of political, social and economic change. As a semi-peripheral colony during the period of liberal colonialism, the Venezuelan higher education system emerged later than in the colonial centres, and therefore did not have a particularly strong tradition of Church involvement in university affairs. This early dynamic put Venezuela on a different educational path than in the colonial centres, such as Colombia and Chile, where the legacies of strong private and religious educational traditions led to the subordination of public higher education. Beginning in 1721 with the foundation of the University of Caracas, and especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Venezuelan universities have bolstered the infrastructural power of the state by training the professional classes that carry out many of its most important administrative and economic tasks. In return, the public universities have always received some measure of funding from the central state, relying on the executive branch for the majority of resources needed to accomplish their academic and social missions. At the same time, however, students, professors, and university authorities have routinely challenged national political power during periods of democracy and dictatorship, mounting fierce challenges when the state has tried to constrain, control, or otherwise influence the internal affairs of universities. These skirmishes over university autonomy, the right of such institutions to self-government, are as constitutive of the relationship
between the public universities and the state as the state's self-avowed fiduciary commitment to free public higher education. The relationship between the state and public university sector may be mutually transformative, but it has never been easy.

One effect of these ongoing state-university dynamics is that the Venezuelan university itself has changed considerably over the last three centuries. The original colonial model transported from Spain, a unitary institution that served the Church and royal authority, evolved into a Napoleonic model consisting of decentralized faculties that answered much more to the central state than to university authorities. It was only in the early- to mid-twentieth century that a genuinely Latin American model of the public university materialized. The principles of university democracy, autonomy, and social obligation first introduced by the 1918 Córdoba reforms spread from Argentina to many other Latin American states and fused with the existing Napoleonic model to create a new form of the university. This Latin American model was challenged by the debt crisis and political turmoil, and is adapting (or being replaced, as some argue) by a new model primarily concerned with insertion into the knowledge economy and global capitalism. While the original model of the Latin American university withstood these challenges relatively well in Venezuela, the ambitious transformative goals of the Chávez government put its future — and the future of university autonomy — into question.
Chapter 3

The ‘Magical’ State: The Universalization of Venezuelan Higher Education

The ideational and institutional factors outlined at the end of Chapter 2 significantly shaped Venezuelan higher education reform between 1999 and 2012. This chapter considers one of the four cases in this dissertation, the expansion of the Venezuelan public higher education system. I use ‘expansion’ to describe two related processes. First, the term refers to the creation of new public post-secondary institutions and programs of higher education, including public universities, vocational colleges, and auxiliary programs that were created in a bid to increase accessibility to higher education. These “access reforms” (Grindle, 2004, p. 6) were part of the Chávez government’s mission to universalize higher education, a key social objective of the Bolivarian movement. Second, expansion refers to the progressive enlargement of state presence and power within the Venezuelan university system. The state drew upon its existing capacity to create new institutions and programs that remained under the direct supervision of the executive branch, not new institutions that functioned as a source of autonomous or semi-autonomous institutional power. In the very act of establishing these new higher education providers, in other words, the state secured even more influence within the public higher education sector and across Venezuelan territory.

In what follows I first give a broad overview of how higher education universalization unfolded, briefly contextualizing the process conceptually and then nationally. While not exhaustive, the evidence indicates that the state achieved much of what it set out to do with respect to universalization in the Chávez period. The remainder of the chapter then discusses

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54 See the Glossary for concise explanations of these terms.
55 Common access reforms include building infrastructure, expanding bureaucracies, and increasing budgets, and can be distinguished from quality-enhancing reforms, which typically aim to increase efficiency, improve accountability and transparency, and increase local control over educational provision. See Grindle (2004, p. 6) for a comparison of access and quality reforms.
how the interactions of autonomy, capacity, and the strategic choices of reformers allowed the Chávez administration to accomplish sweeping reform in such a relatively short period of time. The state increased its autonomy relative to the university sector primarily by using policy, bureaucratic, and institutional recentralization strategies (Dickovick and Eaton, 2013) that further concentrated decision-making authority in key ministries and office of the president. This was accomplished by several reorganizations of the Ministry of University Education, a 2005 presidential decree that changed the state’s relationship to the National Council of Universities (CNU), and the informal fusion of the Office for University Sector Planning (OPSU) with the Ministry of University Education. In all instances institutional autonomy became further concentrated in the central state.

The shift in the balance of autonomy assisted state elites as they conceptualized and adopted higher education initiatives, but it was the state’s ability to draw upon considerable material and organizational capacity that truly made it possible to successfully implement the reforms. While reformers occasionally drew upon important symbols and historical narratives to frame their plans, symbolic resources in this case were not as essential as in the episodes of contention discussed in Chapter 4. Instead, the material resources available to the central state especially after 2003 facilitated the rapid institutional expansion that became the hallmark of university transformation. This was not, however, a deterministic relationship. The strategic choices of reformers, not so much in terms of when to increase higher education spending relative to electoral cycles as in terms of how and where to direct those expenditures, had a much more significant effect on the implementation of universalization initiatives. Because Venezuelan

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56 Dickovick and Eaton (2013, p. 1460) list three types of institutional recentralization strategies: the presidential use of other national institutions like the judiciary or military to restrict the actions of subnational governments, the creation of new subnational institutions that “crowd out” subnational governments, and the suppression of organizations that represent subnational interests at the national level of power.
opposition parties were weak and internally divided following the collapse of the two-party political system, to the point where “the pendulum of Venezuelan opinion seemed to swing to the opposite extreme, from placing all bets on parties to simply refusing to bet on parties at all” (Corrales, 2001, p. 103), the intensity of political competition had only a small effect on social spending increases. Instead, the distribution of funds was primarily determined by the extent to which reformers prioritized the universalization programs over the existing public universities. Between 2004 and 2012, state elites progressively diverted resources from the public university sector to the universalization programs and institutions directly supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education. While the oil boom was a necessary condition for the expansion of the university system, alone it does not sufficiently explain the patterns of universalization reform.

This chapter is divided into four major parts. First, I outline the basic accomplishments of the Venezuelan state achieved between 1999 and 2012. I provide an overview of the new higher education institutions and programs created by the executive branch, discuss the significant increase in matriculation rates, and show how the territorial distribution of universities progressively expanded across time and space. I then divide attempts to devise and implement universalization policies into three stages. In Stage 1 (1999 to 2002), the government and new state elites set the agenda for higher education reform and made significant efforts to redesign the bureaucratic organization of the public higher education system. In this context of state reform, ‘municipalization’ emerged as the primary policy trajectory of the state in matters of higher education. Stage 2 began in 2003 when state elites started to implement new programs (including but not limited to those based on principles of municipalization) and create new

57 The identification of stages is intended to be a useful heuristic device rather than an absolute periodization of education reform. Although it is the case that the first stage (1999-2002) was primarily one of agenda-setting and design and that the latter two (2003-2009 and 2010-2012) were primarily concerned with implementation, the state continued to design new policies for specific projects throughout the duration of Chávez’s time in power. Design and implementation continually overlapped as the state and government adapted to changing conditions.
institutions that dramatically expanded educational opportunity for Venezuelan citizens. This intensive phase of reform lasted until approximately 2009, and occurred with little involvement or interaction with the existing universities. In the third and final stage, from 2010 to 2012, the state shifted its focus from the creation of new programs to the transformation of existing vocational colleges and technical institutes into regional experimental universities, resulting in significant growth in the number of public experimental (non-autonomous) Venezuelan universities. I end the chapter by exploring how the balance of institutional power and the strategic choices of elites ultimately led to the further concentration and centralization of power in the Venezuelan state.

**The Consequences of Universalization Policy**

The expansion of the higher education system was a significant point of pride for Venezuelan state and government elites during the Chávez period. The Ministry of University Education in particular touted the reforms as far-reaching and a cornerstone of the social transformation promised in the 1999 Constitution. Indeed, the empirical changes that resulted from the introduction and implementation of Bolivarian higher education reform were quite substantial. Not all of the changes can be considered in detail here, nor is it appropriate to discuss at length the various debates about the efficacy of the reforms. For the current purpose, it is sufficient to highlight two concrete consequences of university transformation, both of which had the ultimate effect of enhancing state power throughout the public university system: the increased number of students in new state-supervised institutions, and the greater distribution of those institutions across the Venezuelan territory, a cause and outcome of the growing infrastructural power of the state.
The first effect of university transformation was the empirical growth of the university system. Over the span of thirteen years the state oversaw the creation of 29 public and 22 private institutions of university education. In the public sector the state created a staggering 22 new public universities and an additional seven university technological institutes (IUTs). The total number of public universities operating within Venezuela more than doubled, and meant that for the first time in the nation’s history, universities displaced IUTs as the most frequently established type of post-secondary educational institution. This Bolivarian strategy reflected a clear preference of the government and state elites to privilege *university* education in public policy, not other forms of higher education like vocational colleges, a reversal of the trend in the 1980s and 1990s where expansion was primarily driven by the growth of the private university sector.58

The main point of creating the new universities was, of course, to increase the number of students that the system could absorb. The state achieved a great deal in this regard. More students than ever before had access to higher education. Matriculation and graduation rates of students at public universities skyrocketed between 1999 and 2012. Government statistics indicate that Mission Sucre, one of the Bolivarian Missions first discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1 (and discussed in greater detail below), went from serving almost 43,000 students in 2004 to 587,000 students in 2008 (MPPEU, 2010, p. 46), most of whom were proudly absorbed by the Bolivarian University (Casañas, 2005, p. 17). According to the Ministry, university enrolment grew 192 percent between 1998 and 2010 (an increase of over 1.5 million students in a total population of almost 30 million). Total undergraduate numbers in all

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58 Between 1980 and 1998 non-state actors were responsible for the creation of 45 private institutions of university education (31 IUTs and 14 universities) compared to only 18 public institutions (16 IUTs and two universities). By 2012 this trend had completely reversed. The 29 new public institutions were accompanied by seven private universities and 15 IUTs, most of which were established during the first few years of Chávez winning the presidency.
universities increased from approximately 835,000 in 2000 to 2,000,000 in 2008, and total graduate enrolment grew from 59,000 to 103,000 in the same period (MPPEU, 2010, p. 11). Of these new students, 70 percent attended public institutions, especially the Bolivarian University and the University of the Armed Forces. In part because the private sector continued to grow in the first stage of Bolivarian education reform, the number of students attending such institutions also increased. However, the percentage of students registered in private universities dropped from 41 percent in 2000 to 28 percent in 2008, while the percentage of pupils in public institutions grew from 29 percent to 72 percent (MPPEU, 2010, p. 12).

The demographic profiles of Venezuelan students in higher education also changed as the state increasingly prioritized accessibility for popular sectors and specific groups that faced particular barriers. In 2005 the state began to offer university education to prisoners, claiming to have educated almost 600 incarcerated Venezuelans as of 2009 (MPPEU, 2010, p. 33). A 2007 resolution to ensure accessibility to quality education for people with disabilities led to the creation of assistive technology centres in three institutions by 2009 (MPPEU, 2010, p. 29). Finally, in 2009, indigenous peoples were guaranteed the right to intercultural and multilingual higher education that would transcend “the hegemonic Western-Eurocentric tradition” and emphasize ancestral forms of knowledge (MPPEU, 2010, p. 31). In 2011 this led the Ministry to assume responsibility for the Indigenous Peoples’ University in Bolívar state, an organization that was initially created outside of the public system by a local indigenous rights group in 2001.

In these empirical terms, the state’s efforts to rehabilitate and improve public university education appear to have been quite effective. Yet some qualifications about these statistics are in order, as most come directly from the state or from international organizations that rely on government data). This is not inherently a cause for worry, but interactions during field research
made it clear that some may not be especially precise. According to a former official who worked at the Office of University Sector Planning, for example, the sheer quantity of people incorporated into the system placed an enormous administrative burden on the state bureaucracy and led to several situations where students were counted twice, “not because the minister or the president wanted to trick people but because they have many people that are not prepared to develop the responsibilities [necessary to ensure accurate data collection]” (Interview 1, 2012). In one case, participants in one government higher education program were accounted for twice: once by administrators of that program, and once by administrators at the university within which they were later enrolled. The official in question said that he privately mentioned it to the government statisticians, “and they realized the mistake, but they can’t go back! They can’t say, ‘we made a mistake!’ The numbers have increased, that is true. But not in the amount they say” (Interview 1, 2012). When considering these and other statistics, then, it is wise to be cautious about potential unreliability.

The second major effect of the universalization policies designed and implemented between 1999 and 2012 was spread of new universities and, by extension, state power across the national territory. That all of the new universities were experimental, which is to say that they did not hold internal elections and that the Ministry of Higher Education selected their authorities, effectively meant that each university had the potential to function as a representative of the state’s interests.59 This should not necessarily be taken to mean that each university was a simple proxy for state power, or that each of these institutions had identical relationships to the state. However, they certainly did not have the same legal autonomous status as the five formally autonomous universities (the Central University of Venezuela, the University of Zulia, the

59 Refer to Chapter 1 for discussion of how universities can act in service of the state, even if they are not part of the formal state apparatus.
University of the East, the University of the Andes, and the University of Carabobo). Instead, they were directly supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Comparative visual representations of the geographic and historical distribution of these institutions illustrate the extent of this territorial expansion. I created the following figures using a service called Zeemaps, which uses Google Maps technology to allow users to create and customize maps based on original data. I compiled the data for these maps by conducting a search of the Office of University Sector Planning (OPSU) website by region and by state. I then crosschecked the information from OPSU by going to the institutions’ websites to ensure that the locations were correct, and to record the dates that they were founded.

Figures 1-4 show the progressive territorial expansion of the public higher education system across four periods: 1721-1957, from the creation of the first university until just prior to democratization; 1958-1978, the decades following democratization and including rapid development due in part to the oil boom; 1979-1998, the years of economic crisis and political upheaval, and 1999-2012, the duration of the two Chávez administrations. Each plot point represents the main campus of one university, where university authorities are located.60 Expressed in such a way these figures provide a straightforward account of the distribution of institutional autonomy vis-à-vis the state: in those locations where there are experimental universities, which is to say where authorities are selected by the state, the state exists as a source of power. In locations where there are autonomous universities, institutional power is relatively independent of the state.

60 To show the complete picture I have also included private universities. The growth of private institutions is often a response to patterns of growth in the public sector, whether it was the Catholic reaction to the secularization of universities in the nineteenth century, backlash against the perceived deficiencies of the public system that led to the growth of secular elite private universities, or the growth of non-elite private universities created to absorb the demand that neither the public nor Catholic or elite private sectors could absorb (Levy, 1986, p. 27). The explosion of private institutions in the ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s and into the 1990s is clearly an example of this absorptive function, while the rapid decline during the Chávez period may be as much a consequence of greater public opportunity as it was government reticence about allowing any growth outside of the public sector.
These maps can be viewed in greater detail online at http://j.mp/1TJORxd and http://j.mp/1TJP2Zv.
Expressed this way, the evidence clearly shows that the institutional expansion that occurred during the Chávez period was historically unparalleled not only quantitatively, but also spatially.

These maps can be viewed in greater detail online at [http://j.mp/1TJPaZ3](http://j.mp/1TJPaZ3) and [http://j.mp/1TJPkzC](http://j.mp/1TJPkzC).
The 22 new public universities created within the thirteen-year period stretched the territorial boundaries of public higher education, with a number of universities opening in areas that did not previously have such institutions. The most remote universities were the Indigenous University, in the interior of Bolívar state, and the Pedro Camejo Polytechnic University in Apure state. The rest of the universities were in larger urban areas — four in Caracas alone — and distributed across the more populous northern areas, favouring the northwest, already home to many universities, but also making inroads in the northeast, which had previously been served only by the autonomous University of the East (UDO) and two private universities. The new universities were predominantly created in areas that lacked private universities but where autonomous universities had been long established; the only exception is the UDO in Cumaná, Sucre. The creation of these new state-supervised universities in areas where there were already public universities may indicate that the state wanted to provide an educational and institutional alternative to the autonomous model of the university.

Figure 3.5 provides an alternative representation that illustrates the spatial distribution of all universities and their satellite or auxiliary locations, ranging from full campuses to remote research labs, as of the end of 2012.\footnote{It is possible that some of these satellite locations opened after 1998, but because it is very difficult to find specific dates for many of these I include them all here.} This provides a fuller picture of the specifically territorial distribution of autonomous, experimental, and private universities, but also over-represents the concentration of institutional power: the satellite locations do not typically have their own authorities, whether installed by the state or elected by the university community. For example, the Punto Fijo campus of the University of Zulia does not have its own rector, but is instead governed by the authorities at the Maracaibo campus. Each of these plot points therefore
represents an expression of power, but is not itself a place where autonomous power — whether state or university — rests.

Figure 3.5. The Territorial Distribution of Venezuelan Universities and Satellite Campuses, 2012

In general terms, then, it is clear that the state was successful in implementing a variety of policies that furthered the process of higher education universalization. These empirical changes, however, are not themselves explanations. What explains why the state was able to bring so many new students into the higher education system? What factors enabled the state to establish 22 new public universities within a thirteen year period, a herculean accomplishment for almost any country let alone one just emerging from two decades of political and economic strife? I explore these questions in depth in the next sections by discussing the three successive stages of universalization reform first identified in the introduction to this chapter.
Stage 1: Setting the Reform Agenda: 1999-2002

The initial stage of higher education reform in Bolivarian Venezuela occurred within the much broader context of social, political and economic crisis described in the Introduction and in Chapter 2. When Chávez came to power, “sclerosis and decay was pronounced at all levels and in all institutions. There was no effective civil service, the public welfare system was in an advanced state of collapse, educational provision was restricted and insubstantial, the prison system was underfunded and overcrowded and the police service was incapable of providing a minimum level of security” (Buxton, 2005, p. 337). In 1998, the year of the presidential election that brought Chávez to power, 28 percent of Venezuelans identified education as the most important problem facing the country, well ahead of the labour market (19 percent) and corruption (14 percent) (Grindle, 2004, p. 52). In the realm of higher education in particular, almost 62 percent of Venezuelans indicated that the country's university education system was "somewhat deficient" or "very deficient" (Grindle, 2004, p. 53).

This complex situation provided a tremendous challenge for the new government after Chávez was sworn into office, but it also gave reformers an excellent opportunity to fashion themselves as diametrically opposed to the system they inherited. By rejecting the foundations of the previous political system Chávez and his political allies were able to capitalize upon much of the population’s anger and turn disillusionment into political gain, framing higher education reform as part of a much larger process of institutional and political transformation. Even though so many Venezuelans regarded the education system poorly there was little social mobilization around these issues when Chávez took office (Grindle, 2004, p. 55), investing state and government elites with the power to take the lead in setting the reform agenda.
In a broad sense, education was already on the agenda even before Chávez was elected. Many members of the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200, the radical group that predated the MVR (see the Introduction), joined the military because such service was one of the only ways for poor people to access opportunities for professional and educational advancement at the country’s military academies and public universities (López Maya, 2011, p. 214). Chávez’s own experiences are representative of this path. In the president’s hometown of Sabaneta, in the state of Barinas, ambitious young men had two primary career paths that could take them out of the local context: baseball, and the military. Though longing for the former Chávez opted for the latter, moving to Caracas to attend the Venezuelan Academy of Military Sciences as a teenager. There, Chávez was part of the first cohort to receive formal instruction according to a new curriculum designed by leftist and nationalist officers, which exposed soldiers to the historical and philosophical traditions of nationalist independence leaders, folk leaders, and the Venezuelan armed forces (Gott, 2000). Several years later Chávez returned to Caracas to study for a Masters degree in political science at Simón Bolívar University, an institution known for excellence in science and technology. Although he finished his coursework Chávez left in 1991 without completing the degree, for he had more urgent matters to attend to: preparations for the 1992 coup attempt against Carlos Andrés Pérez. Benjamin Scharifker, rector of Simón Bolívar University from 2005 to 2009, dryly described this political intervention as Chávez’s “graduate fieldwork” (Scharifker, personal interview, 2012a).

The leftist and nationalist ideas that coloured the educational experiences of key members of the Bolivarian movement’s founding soldiers had great bearing on the extent to which education was prioritized as a key policy arena once Chávez was elected. Philosophically the Bolivarian approach to education began as a pastiche of this nationalist and revolutionary historiography,
neo-Marxist critical pedagogy, and to some extent stylized ideas of select liberal thinkers like Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez and even Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Over the course of Bolivarianism in power, and especially as reform efforts encountered institutional and political opposition, this loose collection of ideas and values crystallized in an identifiable Bolivarian view of education that was fundamentally rooted in the ideals of the larger political project. Proponents saw knowledge as the product of social relations and as inherently, constitutively political, constructed by and inextricable from the political and economic conditions of its production. As such, educational institutions — including universities — were understood not only as academic but also as fundamentally political, and therefore well within the scope of Bolivarian efforts to stimulate major political transformation.

**Ministerial Reorganization and Bureaucratic Cohesion**

Following Chávez’s inauguration the Venezuelan state underwent an extensive institutional redesign that included the partial reorganization of the executive branch and many of the accompanying ministries. The restructuring of the educational bureaucracy began in 2000 with the amalgamation of several ministries into a new Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD), a task undertaken by minister Héctor Navarro, an electrical engineer (PhD, University of Manchester), professor from the Central University, and one of Chávez's closest confidantes. The resulting ministry consisted of four vice ministries and 29 adjacent offices ranging from indigenous issues to cultural management and the coordination of public sporting associations. The consolidation of these issue arenas in one large ministry made it possible for elites to take stock of the context they inherited and begin to coordinate an action plan, but the breadth of responsibility located in the MECD also resulted in a large bureaucracy that, while relatively independent, was ill equipped to focus on the development and implementation of the large-scale
reforms that the incoming government both wanted and promised. However, although there were no vice ministries of primary or secondary education (these were in the domain of the Vice-Ministry of Educational Affairs), the MECD did have a distinct higher education vice ministry that consisted of five offices concerned with university institutes and colleges, university relations, legal services, statistics, and administration and personnel (see Figure 3.6). This can be taken as an indication that post-secondary education already held a particular importance for the Bolivarian elite within the larger educational and bureaucratic contexts.

Minister Navarro’s broad responsibility for all levels of education (not to mention culture and sport) meant that he relied extensively on a design team of senior bureaucrats and policy makers. During this period the major reformers were all figures who identified with leftist thought and who had been personally opposed to previous Acción Democrática and COPEI governments that they considered corrupt and neoliberal (García Guadilla et al., 2006, p. 8). One of Navarro's most important resources was Luis Fuenmayor Toro, a professor of medicine, former president of the Central University’s Professors’ Union (1986-1988) and former rector at the Central University (1998-1992). Using his power of appointment, Navarro named Fuenmayor director of OPSU62 in 1999. The two men were both friends and colleagues; Navarro had served on the Central University’s university council when Fuenmayor was rector, and both were early champions of the Bolivarian project. Fuenmayor (the great nephew of one of the founders of the Communist Party of Venezuela, Juan Bautista Fuenmayor Rivera) described himself as less committed to Chávez than Navarro, but this did not present a problem given that he was the director of an independent technical office rather than in government. With their roles clearly defined, the two men worked together closely to develop and implement the earliest universalization initiatives,

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62 The Office of University Sector Planning was created in 1970 to support the work of the National Universities Council by providing technical assistance in matters or educational planning. It is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
including the Sucre and Alma Mater Missions (although the latter was not implemented until after Fuenmayor left his position).

Figure 3.6. Organization of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD)
Navarro’s close personal relationship with Chávez notwithstanding, the MECD and OPSU had considerable independence from the president during this period, a reality that was at least in part a product of Chávez’s preoccupation with growing conflict in the national political arena. As Fuenmayor put it when I spoke with him in 2012, “Chávez did not pay attention to the universities because he had big problems with the armed forces, with PDVSA oil production, with building the party. He had to solve those problems first, before seeing to health and education.” This began to change in January 2002, when the government created a separate Ministry of Higher Education to work in tandem with the MECD, National Universities Council, and Office of University Sector Planning (Parra Sandoval, 2010, p. 118). Navarro relinquished his position as minister of the MECD to Aristóbulo Istúriz, a Central University professor and passionate Chávez supporter, and assumed charge of the new ministry before him. The organization of the new ministry was formally codified in March, and published in the Official Gazette in April 2002, just nine days before the coup attempt against President Chávez.63 This ministerial reorganization was a relatively simple task for the state to accomplish because “whereas policy-based [recentralization] strategies will require the cooperation of legislators […] and whereas institutional and societal strategies necessarily require the participation of other institutions and civil society groups, internal bureaucratic changes can be decided upon and enforced by a relatively small number of actors and the top of the executive branch” (Dickovick and Eaton, 2013, p. 1458). Such reforms were neither controversial nor difficult to achieve, and by the end of 2002 the state seemed to be well on its way to having a relatively cohesive bureaucracy capable of designing the specific details of the universalization project.

63 The details of this coup attempt are discussed in greater detail below.
Higher Education Spending

The role of material capacity during Stage 1 of the universalization project was small, partly because of events in the domestic political economy and partly because material resources were simply not as critical during agenda-setting and design processes as they were in the implementation phases of universalization reform. In the very week that Chávez was elected president, in December 1998, “Venezuelan oil prices had reached their lowest level in nearly three decades” (Hausmann and Rodríguez, 2013, p. vii). For an oil dependent state just emerging out of economic crisis, this was something of an inauspicious start. In order to contend with this delicate situation and the legacies of prior neoliberal reform, the new administration began by...
following a moderate economic path guided in part by figures from the very same Caldera administration that had preceded it (Fernandes, 2010, p. 80; Corrales and Penfold, 2011, pp. 47-51). This strategy meant that Chávez did not totally alienate the private sector (Ellner, 2008, p. 110) and that between 1999 and early 2002 the government was able to achieve mediocre economic growth — but growth nevertheless, an important shift from the difficult prior decades (see Figure 3.8). For a time, Venezuela seemed to be experiencing some moderate economic stability even as political polarization continued to divide those who thought Chávez was toeing the neoliberal line and those who thought he advocated too much state intervention (Ellner, 2008, p. 112).

Figure 3.8. Venezuelan Gross Domestic Product (millions USD), 1999-2012

Soon enough any tentative optimism engendered by this relative moderation was displaced as political polarization increasingly destabilized Venezuela. Chávez’s popularity began to decline soon after the 2000 election, and in April 2002 the country fell into political crisis when a "civil society coup" led by the Workers’ Federation of Venezuela (CTV) and the Chamber of Commerce (FEDECAMERAS) removed Chávez from power for 48 hours (Encarnación, 2002, 64

64 Legislative and presidential elections, commonly referred to as the ‘megaelection,’ were held in July 2000. Municipal and state legislative elections followed that December.
Although the coup failed, the trouble facing Chávez was not over. In December 2002 PDVSA management, the heads of CTV and FEDECAMERAS, and the opposition parties staged a three month long oil strike intended to force Chávez to call a new presidential election by shutting down the oil production upon which the state so depended (Ellner, 2008, p. 119). The strike ultimately failed to achieve what its architects wanted, and ended with Chávez reasserting control over PDVSA by firing almost 19,000 company workers by February 2003 (Wiseman and Beland, 2010).

It was in this context, first of moderation and then of great instability, that the fiscal framework for the universalization of higher education was constructed. The transformative ambitions of Navarro and Fuenmayor were enabled by increasing fiscal transfers from the central state to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, which in turn distributed the funds to the higher education sector. While higher education spending remained at 1.58 percent of GDP by expenditures in 1999 and 2000, it jumped to 2.02 percent of GDP in 2001. Pribble (2013, p. 162)

Figure 3.9. National Higher Education Budget (current prices), 1999-2012


partially attributes this to what she describes as the most intensive period of electoral competition during the Chávez period, although it is more accurately described as more diffuse political
contestation: after the megaelections in 2000, there were no other national elections until 2005, but the country was wracked by the political instability described above. One explanation for this jump in spending is therefore that the government knew it needed to retain enough legitimacy for a critical mass of Venezuelans to want it to stay in power, and that this could be achieved by focusing on social spending in sectors that had not fared well during the 1980s and 1990s.

*Designing and Framing ‘Municipalization’*

The combination of autonomy and capacity described above allowed the Venezuelan state — specifically the Ministry of Education — to devise a public policy framework based on the concept of ‘municipalization.’ The term ‘municipalization’ has its roots in earlier Latin American governments (including Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Perú) that undertook decentralization reforms in a variety of social policy arenas, sometimes but not always associated with neoliberal restructuring. Dickovick (2007, p. 15) argues that municipalization offered these governments a way to weaken regional challengers by assigning revenue transfers directly to municipalities, removing control over social spending from subnational states, and implementing judicial changes that gave municipalities more constitutional rights. In the educational contexts, it referred to the devolution of responsibility for the financial, administrative, infrastructural and curricular affairs of public schools to municipalities (*municipios*), which proponents argued would improve the efficiency of the central state and lead to greater educational equity (Fiske, 1996, p. 3; Gauri, 1998, p. 81; Grindle, 2001; Nickson, 2002; Siavelis et al, 2002, p. 285).

Unlike as in many other Latin American countries, the term ‘municipalization’ did not figure prominently in Venezuelan president Carlos Andrés Pérez’s (1989-1993) far-reaching reform efforts (see Chapter 2), and the extent of educational decentralization itself was comparatively limited (Nickson, 2002, p. 279). Because the term was largely alien to the Venezuelan context,

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65 A separate Ministry of Higher Education (later the Ministry of University Education) was not created until 2002.
the Chávez administration was able to appropriate and apply it to its own vision of educational reform. In fact, when the Chávez government introduced municipalization, it was presented as an antidote not just to the decentralization reforms of the prior two decades, but of the entire neoliberal project institutionalized between 1989 and 1998, during which time universities were, as one author sympathetic to the Bolivarian project put it, “increasingly converted into training centres for the minority, for the elite, while masses of youth were excluded and Venezuela accumulated a social debt of half a million qualified people whose desire to enter the higher education system went unfulfilled” (Casañas, 2005, p. 13). Municipalization was just as much a policy corrective as it was a discursive and institutional repudiation of the second presidential administrations of Carlos Andrés Pérez and Rafael Caldera.

The Chávez government never offered a precise, programmatic definition of municipalization, but in general terms it referred to a dual administrative and territorial process of strengthening connections between institutions of university education and the local communities within which they were embedded. The initial legal basis for municipalization was located in Article 168 of the Constitution, which identified municipalities as the primary units in the organization of the state (Art 168). It was only logical, then, that higher education reformers take the municipios into consideration as important jurisdictions. Like the decentralization reforms outlined above, the Bolivarian iteration of municipalization emphasized the ownership of local communities in the planning and provision of higher education. But whereas municipalization in other national contexts stressed the devolution of decision-making and fiduciary responsibility between levels of government, in the Bolivarian version the central state maintained its commitment to public funding and focused instead on encouraging local decision-

66 The term ‘municipalization,’ despite its potential applicability to other areas of social policy, was only affiliated with higher education.
making in the spirit of popular participation, "endogenous development," and "protagonist democracy" (Ojeda, 2005, p. 49). Local communities were to have far more influence in the affairs of higher education institutions, and such institutions would in turn be much more receptive and accountable to public input. For example, communities could decide to incorporate locally relevant examples into the curriculum of a given program or to prioritize some programs over others depending on the needs of the community.

Municipalization also included a distinctly territorial component, sometimes referred to as territorialization. With the same overarching goal of achieving universalization in higher education, the state sought to create more opportunities for university enrolment outside of the most populous cities so that students could access education without having to uproot themselves from their local communities. This was intended to lessen the financial and personal strain on students and also to prevent a regional brain drain by encouraging graduates to remain in their own communities instead of permanently migrating to more populated or developed areas. Rather than remain apolitical or neutral institutions that did not take local contexts into account, they were to exhibit an awareness of "geohistorical space" by responding to local needs and cultural traditions. After 2007, when the idea of ‘popular power’ became a major part of the government’s discourse, it was often discussed in ministry documents as a matter of territorial equity: “university education must contribute to the explosion of communal power and the

67 The term "protagonist democracy" is often used by supporters of the Bolivarian project, and is meant to emphasize the agency of those historically underrepresented or excluded from social and political power. According to Wilpert (2011), "the term does not translate well, but it means to say that citizens are not only supposed to participate in the democratic process, but that they also take an actively involved role" (p. 125). See López Maya and Lander (2011) for a careful genealogy of 'participatory' and 'protagonist' democracy in Venezuela.

68 It is also important to note that the state retained the ultimate authority about how a given program was administered. Designated representatives reported to the MPPEU and ensured that local decision-makers were acting appropriately and upholding the principles of the Bolivarian movement.

69 Subsequently, in 2005, the Organic Municipal Public Power Law further legally justified the policy by designating municipalities, parishes, and other local entities as the main arenas for communities to plan, implement and supervise public policies (Brewer-Carias, 2010, p. 115). Later still the concept of popular power was used to legitimize municipalization, although it was not institutionalized as such until the 2012 Organic Popular Power Law.
creation of a new geometry of power driven by endogenous and sustainable development” (MPPEU, 2012, p. 6).\(^7\)

Concern with designing a new Bolivarian higher education policy may have dominated the first stage of higher education reform during this period, but the state still made some concrete, early efforts to expand access to university education even without an ideologically consistent policy trajectory. In addition to opening five new technical institutes in the states of Apure, Barinas, Bolívar, Miranda and Táchira, the state created the Yaracuy National Experimental University (authorized when president Caldera was still in power), the Jesús María Semprum National Experimental University, and the National Experimental Caribbean Maritime University. These new universities were the first public institutions to open since 1983, heralding the return of the state in the higher education sector. At the same time, the private higher education sector continued to grow as it had in the decade prior to Chávez’s presidency, outpacing the public sector with the establishment of four new universities and eleven technical institutes between 1999 and 2002. The empirical effects of expansion during this first stage of reform were therefore modest, but the development of municipalization policies set the stage for the major reforms that followed.

**Stage 2: Implementing Municipalization and the Bolivarian Missions: 2003-2009**

The government’s universalization program, largely driven through the strategy of municipalization crafted between 1999 and 2002, found institutional and organizational expression during the 2003-2009 period. First, in 2003, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Office of University Sector Planning (OPSU) introduced a program called Mission Sucre, part of a larger social policy initiative called the Bolivarian Missions. The Bolivarian Missions were a

\(^7\) The term ‘geometry of power’ emerged in approximately 2007 to refer to attempts to establish direct relationships with local communities irrespective of subnational governments (Banko, 2009, 171).
set of social programs, including subsidized supermarkets, free local health clinics, and remedial primary and secondary education initiatives, that provided access to a range of resources and services to poor Venezuelans (Hawkins, 2010). Mission Sucre, named after independence leader Antonio José de Sucre, was intended to be a strategic alternative to what state and government elites perceived to be the exclusionary character of the existing higher education system and the massive social debt incurred between 1989 and 1999. Administered by the Ministry of Higher Education, its purpose was to develop and execute programs that would remove or reduce barriers to higher education for high school graduates who were qualified to enter post-secondary institutions but who faced socioeconomic barriers. This drive to expand access took the form of bursaries and administrative assistance provided by a new University Initiation Program, as well as the extension of study opportunities outside of existing higher education institutions (Hawkins, 2010).

In a further attempt to increase the number of university-educated professionals and technicians, Mission Sucre also introduced some more permanent specialized programs within existing universities. Programs in electricity, geology, law and others were established within places like the University of the Arts and Yaracuy Experimental University, as well as in technical university institutes in Cabimas, La Victoria and Los Teques. Mission Sucre also made use of public spaces in areas without existing higher education infrastructure. These improvised learning spaces were known as ‘university villages’ (aldeas universitarias in Spanish, where aldeas functions as an acronym for ‘Local Environments for Alternative Socialist Educational Development’). The villages were to form a large network of sites that would constitute the basic infrastructure of the Mission, and would primarily consist of three types: 1) schools, colleges, cultural centres and prisons, 2) facilities created specifically to serve the Mission, and 3)
buildings constructed by the Venezuelan Corporation of Guayana, PDVSA, the armed forces, the Ministry, and governors and mayors. By making use of infrastructure that already existed or that would serve multiple purposes, and by assigning coordinators to each state, the government could provide university education in locations without existing universities (primarily outside of the large urban centres where most universities are concentrated) and ensure precisely the sort of local-central territorial coordination emphasized by the territorialization and municipalization imperatives.

In 2007, four years after Mission Sucre was introduced, the Venezuelan government created a second higher education mission that focused less on the incorporation of students into the university system per se, and more on the territorial expansion and political transformation of the system itself. Mission Alma Mater was established to “promote the transformation of Venezuelan university education and propel its institutional and territorial articulation” (MPPEU, 2009, p. 2). With the active assistance of the national universities affiliated with the Association of Bolivarian Rectors (ARBOL), a group of pro-government university rectors primarily from the experimental universities, the Mission sought to promote the “development and transformation of university education to strengthen Popular Power and the construction of a socialist society.” In a manner consistent with municipalization, the reforms would on the one hand “anchor university education in the national territory in close connection with communities,” and on the other, require providers of higher education to contribute to Latin American and Caribbean unity, cooperation and solidarity (MPPEU, 2009, p. 3). Like Mission Sucre, the administration and supervision of Mission Alma Mater would be overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Communal Councils, new family-based neighbourhood

71 ARBOL was created in 2005 as an alternative to AVERU, the Association of Venezuelan University Rectors. ARBOL formed to represent pro-Bolivarian (chavista) rectors, mainly those from the experimental universities. Both of these associations are addressed in Chapter 4.
associations that received government funding to carry out infrastructural and social projects, about 20,000 of which were formed by 2007 (Ellner, 2008, pp. 127-128). It would also be assisted by a new National Training Program formally established in May 2008, which would help administer degree and training programs in specific areas prioritized in the 2007-2013 National Plan for Social and Economic Development, including history, tourism, teaching and medicine.

Mission Alma Mater sought to accomplish these lofty goals through the extensive reform of non-university institutions of higher education. With the Mission as its backdrop, the Ministry of Higher Education committed itself to the creation of 17 regional or territorial universities that were intended to “democratize access to higher education and stimulate endogenous development” by enhancing the productive, social and cultural needs of cities, states and districts (see Table 3.1). The Mission’s founding document also laid the groundwork for the state to turn 29 technical institutes and colleges into official national polytechnic universities. This transformation was to be primarily curricular and organizational, with existing technical career programs being folded into the National Training Program, and with graduates of certificate programs being given the option to apply earned credits to the pursuit of bachelor or engineering degrees. This would allow the former technical institutes to develop their own research agendas and become more responsive to the productive and social demands of the country (MPPEU, 2008, pp. 14-15). Additionally, in 2009 the mandate of Mission Alma Mater expanded to encompass a new plan to create Socialist University Complexes, strategic hubs that would link post-secondary institutions for the purpose of optimizing resources and human talent. These complexes sought to ensure the distribution of technology, administrate a system of timesharing whereby classroom space would be allocated to the relevant institutions at various points during
the day, evening, and on weekends, and would facilitate accessibility to libraries for students and community members (p. 12).

Table 3.1. Institutional Goals of Mission Alma Mater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation of 29 IUTs and CU's into</td>
<td>Turn 29 vocational institutes and colleges into degree-granting experimental universities</td>
<td>All 23 states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experimental universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 territorial universities</td>
<td>Territorial universities focused on the productive need of the subnational state (and Capital</td>
<td>All states except Delta Amacuro, Falcón, Guárico, Sucre, Táchira, Vargas and Yaracuy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specialized universities</td>
<td>universities focused on the productive need of the subnational state (and Capital District)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 specialized universities</td>
<td>Professional training in specific areas of knowledge, especially for teachers</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 specialized university institutes</td>
<td>Paulo Freire Latin American Institute of Agroecology (IALA) and the Miguel Rodríguez Civil</td>
<td>Barinas (IALA). Aeronautics IUT unspecified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivarian Workers' University</td>
<td>Strengthen the class consciousness of the working class, and recognize the knowledge and</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Peoples of the South</td>
<td>working class, and recognize the knowledge and experience of workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist University Complexes</td>
<td>Promote partnerships with other states in the developing world that correspond to the &quot;new</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>international geopolitics of the south&quot; (p. 11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic hubs to share resources and services related to university education.</td>
<td>Across Venezuela</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As important to universalization as they were, the Missions were not designed to be permanent fixtures of the Venezuelan higher education system, at least not to the same scale. Ultimately the state sought to transform the university system so that it could accommodate extensive public demand within a formal institutional context. This required massive expansion of the existing university system, either by expanding the capacity of existing institutions or by creating new ones. The latter proved easier than the former, and the state created six new universities within an equivalent number of years. The most important of these new institutions, and by quite a wide margin at that, was the Bolivarian University of Venezuela. Created by
presidential decree in 2003, the same year as Mission Sucre, the Bolivarian University was intended to “[help] change the Venezuelan state in the remaking of the country” by promoting participatory, protagonist democracy, and eventually, a new socialist subjectivity (Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, no date). This university was, from the beginning, a highly political and partisan institution.

With its authorities chosen by the Ministry of Higher Education, and with the Caracas campus sitting directly across the street from the Central University in an old Exxon-turned-PDVSA building, the Bolivarian University was intended to assist the state in achieving its political goals in two major ways. The first was by prioritizing poor students. Admissions committees gave preferential treatment to students from poor backgrounds, especially those already participating in Mission Sucre. The central campus in Caracas absorbed most of these students, but several satellite campuses were also established across the country to ensure greater geographic accessibility. The second role of the Bolivarian University related to strengthening the state was its emphasis on new pedagogical philosophies and practices influenced by advocates of popular education and critical pedagogy such as Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. This consisted principally of advocating holistic approaches to knowledge and the cultivation of “dialogical, democratic subject-subject relationships” between instructors and students based not on hierarchy but on mutuality (Muhr and Verger, 2006). In this way the Bolivarian University was supposed to attend to the material and epistemological dimensions of university education and political transformation.

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72 Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal were Brazilian popular educators who promoted radical, popular education as a form of liberation for the oppressed. Freire wrote the enormously important Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 2006), while Boal founded the Theatre of the Oppressed to explore political questions of disenfranchisement through theatre (Babbage, 2004).
The Bolivarian University was created before the language of twenty-first century socialism made its way into the discourses of the government, beginning in 2006, but as the state radicalized so too did the university. In 2006 university authorities began to define the institution as “sustained by the ethical and political values of participatory and protagonist democracy […] and the construction of twenty-first century socialism” (Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, no date), foreshadowing the larger goal of socialist transformation that would soon be outlined in the 2007-2021 National Social and Economic Development Plan. By the end of Chávez’s time in power it had been positioned as the primary driver of education with socialist values, one of the five “motors” of revolution:

Education, rather than the study of a particular area of knowledge, is fundamentally the integral training of citizens. Therefore, according to this criteria the UBV should have, want and need to be a university in which all areas of research, training and social interaction enhance the knowledge, values and attitudes necessary for the formation of revolutionary consciousness so that morals and enlightenment infuse its institutional culture. [The UBV is] a university of socialist education that, with a socialist state, transforms the coherent revolutionary subject able to break from the hegemonic cultural and capitalist system (Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, no date).

With academic degree programs that sought to “train economists in the open confrontation and resistance to neoliberal economics” (political economy), for example, and to promote “socialist environmental management and transformation” (agroecology), the university was clearly an institution that influenced and was influenced by the consolidation of Bolivarian political power, one that sought to promote a socialist subjectivity and epistemology. Venezuelan scholars with whom I spoke in 2012 varied in their assessment of precisely how much the state controlled the university; several offered tempered accounts of the university as a “cheerleader” for the Bolivarian movement, while another described it as “more Napoleonic than in France” (Salcedo, personal interview, 2012).
The Bolivarian University remained the biggest and the most political university established by the Chávez government, but after 2007, when the Ministry of University Education became committed to explicitly socialist transformation, other new institutions followed suit. In 2008 the state authorized the Jesús Rivero Bolivarian Workers’ University (an initiative of the Alma Mater Mission), and a year later the state created a new National Experimental Security University with the mandate of training officers of public safety based on socialist ethics. Experimental universities that already existed were also drawn into the discourses of twenty-first century socialism, in some cases amending their mission statements and changing their iconography to demonstrate allegiances to the Bolivarian state power.

Between 2003 and 2009, then, the Venezuelan higher education system underwent significant organizational and institutional transformation. In many ways, this was made possible due to the design and adoption processes that occurred in Stage 1, between 1999 and 2002. Design and adoption, however, are vastly different from the challenging task of implementation. As Bolivarian elites began to implement municipalization policies within the public higher education system they were faced with a new set of challenges that required access to different power resources. The growing autonomy of the state from oppositional social forces remained of critical importance, as did the organizational cohesion of the state’s educational bureaucracy, although during this period distinct signs of decline began to emerge. Unlike in Stage 1, however, the material capacity of the central state proved to be of great consequence. Without the fiscal capacity to implement the programs described above, the state would not have been able to accomplish as much as it did during this second stage of higher education reform.
Ministerial Politics and Bureaucratic Reform

The close relationship between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and the Office of University Sector Planning that characterized the first stage of higher education reform was short-lived. In 2003, as the newly created Ministry of Higher Education and OPSU began to formally introduce some of the universalization initiatives that had been developed between 1999 and 2002, tensions emerged between Luis Fuenmayor, Héctor Navarro, and Hugo Chávez. Halfway through 2003 the president started to intervene in particular social policy arenas to a greater degree than he had previously, and in a manner that interfered with the plans already undertaken by the Ministry and OPSU. As Fuenmayor told me,

He started with the Bolivarian universities, and when I saw that, I called my people and I said, ‘the president is now going to be occupied with higher education and health.’ I said ‘we have a year left, we have a year and a half left to do what we want,’ and then I knew we would leave the administration. […] I knew I had only a year and a half because I wasn’t going to allow myself to be ordered to do things that are crazy [the creation of new, politicized Bolivarian universities], that are not good for the country (personal interview, 2012).

In December 2004 both Fuenmayor and Navarro left their respective positions as Director of OPSU and Minister of Higher Education. Navarro returned to the Central University of Venezuela to finish a teaching contract, but remained an elected representative for the Fifth Republic Movement and eventually went on to hold various other portfolios, including a reprisal of his role as Education Minister from 2008 to 2010. Fuenmayor left the state bureaucracy completely and turned into one of the president’s most ardent leftist critics, objecting to what he saw as the unacceptable concentration of power in the office of the president, the progressive weakening of democratic institutions, and economic mismanagement.

The timing of this ministerial and bureaucratic turnover is significant. I could not corroborate Fuenmayor’s account, but if it is accurate, it seems that the creation of the Bolivarian University
was a decision driven largely by the president rather than OPSU, the body responsible for sectoral planning. Chávez obviously had political support for this initiative and there was no legal mechanism that required him to acquiesce to the recommendations of bureaucrats or even ministers. Furthermore, the National Universities Council itself authorized the creation of the Bolivarian University, indicating that there was at least some consensus from within the university sector about the appropriateness of this new institution.\(^3\) Chávez’s willingness to initiate and oversee the establishment of the Bolivarian University was therefore not an example of excessive influence. Still, based on Fuenmayor’s narrative and Navarro’s departure, mid-2003 does appear to be a time when both bureaucratic cohesion and bureaucratic independence between the Ministry, OPSU, and the top executive began to decline.

From this point on, according to Carmen García Guadilla et al. (2006), policymaking became a far more ideological affair. María Parra Soler, a professor who earned her PhD in Global Economics and Economic Relations from the University of St. Petersburg, Russia, replaced Luis Fuenmayor as Director of OPSU. Similarly, Samuel Moncada, a PhD from Oxford who worked as a professor and Director of the School of History at the Central University before serving as an advisor to Chávez shortly after he was elected, replaced Héctor Navarro as Minister. Parra Soler and Moncada remained in these positions until they were replaced in 2007, with Parra Soler the subject of rumours that she angered Moncada by asking for clarification about alleged administrative irregularities relating to how OPSU was financed (Méndez, 17 June 2006). Moncada’s successor was Luis Acuña, who held a PhD in physics from the University of Western Ontario and worked as a dean at the Eastern University before being elected to the National Assembly in 2000. His first major task after replacing Moncada was to oversee the

\(^3\) CNU records are not publicly available, and therefore it is not possible to determine how contentious this approval process may have been.
transformation of the Ministry of Higher Education to the Ministry of University Education, a transition that went far beyond a mere name change and affected the organization of the Ministry itself.

This internal restructuring undertaken by Minister Moncada resulted in a ministry that with 27 subsidiary offices was almost as big as had been the MECD in 2000, and that expanded the scope of state power in new issue arenas including strategic planning, curriculum development and student participation (Figure 3.10). For example, a new Vice-Ministry of Student Policy emerged from this change, with four additional offices under its jurisdiction. The inclusion of this new vice-ministry was a clear departure from previous ministerial structures, and normalized the state’s involvement in student politics. The state, in other words, gave itself a formal position of power within the realm of student governance, though not control of independent student organizations. For supporters of the Bolivarian movement this was interpreted as a positive step because it formally involved students in matters that directly impacted them, but for critics it was an example of the creeping surveillance and supervision of their affairs. Venezuelan sociologist of education Orlando Albornoz has called this strategy the concentration of power through its division (Albornoz, 2003, p 101), a similar phenomenon to what Dickovick and Eaton refer to as the deconcentration of power or the “reassignment of responsibilities to locally-situated bureaucrats who remain under the control of national ministries” (p. 1459). In this case, the multiplication of offices within the ministry and the concomitant assertion of authority over previously formally unclaimed areas of governance expanded bureaucratic authority over the higher education sector, even as it theoretically shifted unilateral power away from the minister him- or herself.
Figure 3.10. Organization of the Ministry of Popular Power for University Education (MPPEU)
Minister Acuña was also responsible for the final major change to the higher education bureaucracy before the 2012 presidential election. Following a declaration from Chávez two years prior that all ministries were to be renamed as Ministries of Popular Power *(El Universal, 9 January 2007)*, in 2009 the Ministry of University Education became the Ministry of Popular Power for University Education (MPPEU), solidifying its status as an integral part of the Bolivarian political transition. This rebranding may not have been as consequential for the issues of organizational autonomy and capacity as the structural reorganization in 2008, but it further politicized university education by linking it to the transformative goals of the government (MPPEU, no date). Like the other ministries, the MPPEU emphasized its commitment to fulfilling the strategic objectives of the National Social and Economic Development Plan, “the drive toward a new socialist ethic, the search for maximum social happiness, the strengthening of popular power and protagonist democracy, the socialist model of production, the new geometry of power, the affirmation of Venezuela as a global energy superpower, Latin and Caribbean unity, solidarity with people of the South,” and struggle for a just international order. In particular, the new ministry mission emphasized, the MPPEU would “struggle against capitalist values such as selfishness, competition, consumerism, the naturalization of inequality, the pre-eminence of economic considerations before human and environmental needs, and the commodification of life.” University education was reaffirmed as essential to the territorial development of the nation, the enhancement of popular power, and the transformation of the state, and universities themselves were to remain important engines of national economic and social development, but with a much more ambitious ideological and political end that was predetermined by the state.
The above examples of bureaucratic and ministerial change illustrate important shifts in the state’s internal structure of power. The resignations of the two men primarily responsible for key reform proposals (Navarro and Fuenmayor) shortly after the implementation process began, and subsequent turnover again in 2006 (Parra Soler and Moncada’s departure), illustrated a certain amount of instability within the core group of higher education reformers. All were highly educated and committed to the Bolivarian project, but the fact that turnover was at least in some cases correlated to internal political conflicts — whether in the case of Parra Soler’s concerns about the management of OPSU or Fuenmayor’s tensions with the president — illustrates declining organizational cohesion and the increased influence of the president (and his most trusted advisors) in the process of higher education reform. The effects of these internal shifts had significant bearing on how the state approached universalization reforms in the context of ‘university transformation.’

*The Declining Autonomy of the National Universities Council and the Office of University Sector Planning*

Amid the ongoing changes within the ministerial and bureaucratic context outlined above, the nature of the relationship between the Ministry and other important organs within the higher education system also shifted. The two most important changes in this regard were the relationship of the Ministry to the National Universities Council (CNU) and to OPSU. When the CNU was reestablished in the 1970 Universities Law it was designated as a state-led body “responsible for ensuring universities’ compliance with legislation, to coordinate relations between universities and the rest of the education system, to harmonize their educational, cultural, and scientific plans, and to plan their development in accordance with the country’s needs” (Art 18). With the assistance of OPSU, the existence of which was established in the

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74 See Chapter 2 for historical details on the National Universities Council.
1970 legislation, the CNU was invested with the power to “define the orientation and direction of the development of the university system” (Art. 20.1). Although the CNU did not gain formal independence from the state until 1983 (Rachadell, 2005, p. 32), its structure and composition meant that it functioned with considerable de facto autonomy from the state. By law the Minister of Higher Education oversaw all proceedings, but its democratic bylaws and the lack of any ministerial veto power meant that electoral outcomes could depart from ministerial preferences quite easily. And although the state could in theory whip or at least influence the rectors of experimental universities on important matters, Article 19 of the Universities Law placed limits on the potential expansion of state power by ensuring that “the proportion of representation of these universities before the National Universities Council will not change.” In this way the CNU was fairly well insulated from direct state intervention, even if final decisions about many matters were technically left up to the ministry and/or president.

Signs that the Ministry wanted a different relationship with the National Universities Council first became evident after Samuel Moncada took over the higher education portfolio in 2004. According to statements Luis Fuenmayor gave to the press in 2010, Moncada preferred to work directly through the Ministry rather than the CNU, and convened only three CNU meetings between December 2004 and January 2007 (Universidad de Los Andes, 2010). While this was not a direct infringement upon the CNU’s autonomy, it did render the body less able to participate in the organization and administration of the university system.

Then, in January 2005, President Chávez issued a decree that directly invested the Ministry of Higher Education with powers formerly uniquely held by the Council. Decree 3444, a partial amendment to the existing regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education, transferred a number of decision-making powers previously located in the CNU and OPSU to the Ministry. Of
particular importance in this context was the issue of which body was responsible for creating new institutions and programs of study. Until this point one of the major responsibilities of the CNU was, in consultation with OPSU, to recommend or reject proposals to create new universities (Art. 10) and technical institutes (Art. 11). Technically the CNU had never been able to formally create or approve new institutions or programs because it was not part of the state apparatus, but for thirty years the executive branch generally followed its recommendations. In this way the CNU had traditionally acted as the primary gatekeeper of institutional expansion within the higher education system. Decree 3444 transferred this responsibility to the state, giving the Vice Minister of Academic Policy the right to “process, evaluate and accredit plans to create higher education programs and institutions” (Art. 7.14). It additionally outlined the responsibilities for new state agencies that shared many of the same duties previously within the purview of the CNU and OPSU, including the creation of new academic programs and matters relating to institutional evaluation. Decree 3444 did not strip the CNU and OPSU of those powers, but it did sideline them by allowing the Ministry to also govern in those areas.

Decree 3444 was widely viewed by critics and proponents alike as a stopgap measure to promote university transformation in lieu of a comprehensive new law, the likes of which did not emerge until 2010. Critics saw it as a tool to truncate the scope of influence of the CNU and to bring OPSU closer to the state. Supporters argued that it was one step in the modernization of the system and that it was a necessary compensation for what had become an obsolete organization. Minister Moncada publicly indicated that the reorganization of duties and powers introduced by Decree 3444 was necessary for the development of the system, that the Ministry would work closely with the CNU and OPSU, and that the change did not violate the internal autonomy of universities (Universidad de Oriente, 2005). This last clause is important not only because it
reflects the government’s awareness of university autonomy as a political concern, but because of its accuracy: the reform may have encroached on the autonomy of the CNU by eliminating its *de facto* veto power, which in turn led to the reduced decision-making power of universities within the system, but it did not diminish formal or procedural autonomy within individual institutions. All public universities retained the same level of decision-making power over their internal financial, academic, organizational and administrative autonomy as stipulated in the 1970 Universities Law.

The Ministry’s marginalization of the CNU and extension of control over OPSU further strengthened power in the Venezuelan state in relation to the university sector, but its importance in facilitating institutional expansion should not be overstated. The Bolivarian Missions, those programs that first allowed the state to implement municipalization reforms, operated completely outside of the jurisdiction of the CNU. Their extra-bureaucratic character was, in large part, the point of the Missions: to provide university education in a variety of modalities that were not dependent upon pre-existing academic or material infrastructure. In this area the Council was an almost irrelevant organization to begin with. While some universities — especially the Bolivarian University — were eventually drawn into the Missions’ reform efforts and expected to participate in various ways, Missions Sucre and Alma Mater had a fundamentally non-institutional form that guaranteed their insulation from the reach of bodies like the National Universities Council and allowed them to be easily directed by the office of the president and the Ministry of University Education. One Venezuelan scholar of education described this evasion of formal institutions as a fundamental element of higher education reform during the Chávez period, saying that “Chávez is like the movie Dracula. Every time they show him [Dracula] a crucifix or a picture of Christ, he hides from it. Chávez is hiding from institutionality. He’s
deinstitutionalized the system” (Interview 2, 2012). In this particular context the state’s incursions on the CNU’s autonomy was largely a question of keeping it at a distance, allowing it a semblance of influence but concentrating most decision-making power for the Ministry.

It is worth noting that during this second stage of universalization the state had relatively little engagement with the autonomous universities, at least in terms of bureaucratic intervention, with one significant exception. In January 2008 OPSU and the Ministry of Higher Education announced that they sought to eliminate admissions testing for prospective students, arguing that such exams stood as barriers to educational accessibility for students from lower socioeconomic strata by rewarding students who could afford tutoring, preparatory programs, and other aids. In January 2008 OPSU and the Ministry of Higher Education announced that they sought to eliminate admissions testing for prospective students, arguing that such exams stood as barriers to educational accessibility for students from lower socioeconomic strata by rewarding students who could afford tutoring, preparatory programs, and other aids. The Secretary of the Central University, Cecilia García Arocha (who became Rector shortly thereafter, in May 2008), spoke for the autonomous universities when she told the press that according to the 1970 Universities Law the power to determine admissions criteria rested with each University Council, and that while the National Universities Council could make recommendations about how universities were to organize and administer themselves internally, they could not impose anything against the will of the University Councils (Castillo, 2008). The state’s desire to eliminate these tests was perceived as a violation of administrative and academic university autonomy. Despite the controversy, and with 11 rectors voting against the proposal, the National Universities Council voted to eliminate internal testing in March 2008. Minister Acuña heralded the move as an important step in ensuring that every student seeking to attend a higher education institution would have the opportunity to do so (Castillo, 2008). The autonomous universities, however, defied the ruling and continued to administer their own tests.

Historically, a certain number of study spots within each university were reserved for students chosen by OPSU in an attempt to reduce some socioeconomic disparities to higher education. In 2008, OPSU had use of a quota of approximately 30 percent of all study positions within public universities, and determined allotment based on a combination of undergraduate grades, socioeconomic status, merit, and location. Each university had the power to fill the remaining spots as they wished, and often made use of internal admissions tests.
to applicants, a practice that the state did not challenge until well after Chávez died. The state’s attempt to nullify the universities’ control over their own admissions is indicative of an institutional strategy to limit the autonomy of these important national institutions (Dickovick and Eaton, 2013, p. 1454).

The progressive accumulation of decision-making power in the state relative to the public university sector was a necessary condition to the implementation of universalization programs, but it was not sufficient to actually carry out the desired initiatives. At this stage of reform, the translation of policy prescriptions into concrete results required significant material capacity, both in terms of fiscal resources and infrastructure. The plans for the Missions drawn up by Navarro and Fuenmayor, for example, would have remained thought experiments if not for the state's ability to rely upon the considerable material resources necessary to implement them across Venezuela. As has so often been the case with regard to social programs in Venezuela, the educational accomplishments initiated by the state were very much determined by its ability first to marshal revenue from the production and export of crude oil, and second to make use of appropriate distributive mechanisms given its goals. The oil boom of 2003, the growing use of discretionary funds as a financing tool, and the rerouting of funds previously reserved for universities to the universalization programs were critical factors that allowed the state to achieve such extensive implementation of key reform initiatives.

*The Effects of the 2003 Oil Boom on Higher Education Budgets*

The availability of material resources available to the central state between 2003 and 2009 reflected a combination of increasingly statist fiscal policy (Ellner, 2010) and fluctuations in international oil prices that structured the pace and shape of university reform. However, there is not a clear relationship between the overall performance of the national economy and patterns of
educational spending. While real GDP progressively increased or stagnated between 2003 and 2009 (see Figure 3.8 earlier in this chapter), growth in all education spending was far more erratic, increasing from as much as 37 percent between 2003 and 2004 but contracting by over 15 percent between 2006 and 2007 (Sistema Integrado de Indicadores Sociales de Venezuela, 2015). Spending on higher education in particular reflected a similar pattern. In current prices, total transfers to the Ministry during this period progressively increased, jumping from 2,622 million bolívares in 2002 to 10,529 million bolívares in 2008. This growth allowed government and state officials to point to evidence of their steadfast commitment to funding higher education as a way to relieve the social debt and transform Venezuela into a country of educational equity.

Exclusive consideration of spending in current prices, however, obfuscates the fact that pouring more money into the higher education system did not mean that it was necessarily better funded. When corrected for inflation, the trend is not one of ever-increasing spending, but of modest fluctuation. During this stage of reform the higher education budget ranged from a high of 1.95 percent of GDP by expenditure in 2003, when the economy began to experience the negative macroeconomic effects of the 2002 oil strike, to a low of 1.55 percent in 2008, as the oil boom ended and the economy began to sour. Good economic performance did not mechanistically translate into a windfall for the higher education system, just as poor economic performance did not directly lead to a reduction in expenditures.

Arguments that tie increased social spending to the intensity of electoral competition, especially in Latin American contexts of low party institutionalization and/or charismatic leadership (Pribble, 2013), are similarly unconvincing. Although budgetary transfers rose during legislative and presidential campaigns in 2005 and 2006, the extent to which this

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76 I do not consider two major non-electoral episodes of contention — the 2004 recall referendum and 2007 RCTV protests initiated by the opposition — because national budgets had already been approved for those years.
spending can be attributed to a straightforward desire to pander to the Bolivarian electoral base is debatable at best. Following the failed attempt to recall Chávez in August 2004 the opposition went into a “postreferendum coma” that resulted in half-hearted races to win the state elections that October and, eventually, a last minute decision to boycott the December 2005 legislative elections (Corrales and Penfold, 2007, p. 103). This withdrawal led to a nearly complete vacuum of meaningful electoral competition and ultimately resulted in a supermajority for the Fifth Republic Movement. By the time of the December 2006 presidential election, the opposition “had virtually capitulated” (Corrales & Penfold, 2007, p. 103), and Chávez handily won another six years in office. The Chávez government did not need to spend to undermine the opposition; the opposition did that well enough on its own. The funds directed to the higher education sector during this period were undoubtedly populist, but they cannot be dismissed as strictly patronage-based handouts specifically tied to electoral cycles. Just as the implementation of universalization policies was not driven by a deterministic relationship between the GDP or oil income and the transfers allocated to the Ministry of Higher Education, neither was it driven by strictly electoral considerations.

How, then, did the Venezuelan state achieve such widespread implementation of its universalization programs between 2003 and 2009? Insofar as “general expenditure figures are misleading in the Latin American context because they do not permit an analysis of who receives benefits and of stratification in the quality of services and generosity of transfers” (Pribble, 2013, p. 7), it is much more prudent to explore the distribution of funds at the institutional level rather than their mere allocation in national budgets. Between 2003 and 2009 the public higher education system became increasingly dependent upon extra-budgetary funding mechanisms that allowed the executive branch to distribute one-time, non-renewable fiscal transfers from
discretionary funds controlled by the president. Additionally, a funding gap emerged between the public universities and municipalization programs like the Bolivarian Missions. Beginning in 2004 the Missions became increasingly well funded, but this growth came at the direct expense of transfers to the public universities. While overall higher education spending therefore remained rather unremarkable in constant prices, the new distributive mechanisms significantly altered the financing of the public higher education system to privilege those programs and organizations under state control.

The Emergence of Alternative Higher Education Funding Strategies

The Venezuelan oil boom occurred too late in 2003 for the higher education sector to benefit in terms of the transfers that were allocated to the Ministry through the national budget, although as noted above, spending did increase. That year the primary distributive arrangement between the central state and the public higher education system was largely determined by the consequences of the economic and political turbulence in 2002. Although in current prices transfers allocated to the Ministry of Higher Education dropped by more than half, the lowest point in the entire thirteen year period in question, the higher education budget as a proportion of GDP rose from 1.72 percent in 2002 to 1.95 percent in 2003 (see Figure 3.11). The government therefore clearly continued to prioritize higher education relative to other sectors even in the face of national economic contraction. This commitment mainly took the form of moving forward with the implementation of its municipalization project. Despite the sharp reduction in absolute budgetary transfers from the central state to the Ministry resulting from the oil strike, in July 2003 the president introduced the costly Bolivarian Missions and the Bolivarian University, the only new university established in Venezuela that year. These new initiatives can therefore be
interpreted as part of the increasing political radicalization that occurred after the coup and strike rather than as a direct consequence of higher state revenue.

Mission Sucre and the Bolivarian University may have been part of the government’s overall pro-poor social policy strategy, but the political rationale behind these initiatives was just as clear: to build support for the government in general, and to “promote Chávez’s image and to consolidate his charismatic appeal” (Pribble, 2013, p. 162) in particular. In this sense, universalization was a definitively populist project. The political challenges from the opposition had briefly waned after the oil strike but had not disappeared entirely, and the new social programs were not intended to pacify the opposition but instead to build social and electoral support for a government that rightly anticipated continued challenges to its rule, even in a period without any imminent elections (Stokes et al., 2013, p. 284). This opposition crystallized in the August 2004 recall referendum in which voters were asked to decide whether they wanted Chávez to carry out his term. Sandwiched between the coup attempt and the recall vote, the Missions and the Bolivarian University became a manifestation of the fact that “once the recall became a real possibility […] in 2003, the government felt increasing pressure to deliver on its promises of socioeconomic development [and] seized upon the Missions as the key vehicle for implementing these changes” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 201). However, these programs were made possible not primarily through generous or increased budgetary transfers, but through the use of discretionary funds administered by the office of the president and the diversion of resources away from the public university system.

In approximately 2004, the executive began to make greater use of a pre-existing mechanism that dramatically changed how the Venezuelan public higher education was funded.  

77 2004 is the first year of available data that accounts for these transfers, but it is likely that they were being used prior to this year during Chávez's time in office.
For years predating Chávez, Venezuelan presidents used surplus oil rents to grant ‘additional credits,’ one-time cash transfers intended to be used for specific purposes, to various public entities. During the normal process of formulating a draft of an upcoming year’s budget, the Venezuelan Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Development make a series of macroeconomic projections related to a number of variables including the estimated rate of GDP growth, the estimated rate of inflation, estimated exchange rates, and estimated oil prices. Based on these forecasts the National Budget Office (ONAPRE) defines what it views as a reasonable and appropriate level of expenditure, and prepares the national budget accordingly. Well before Chávez came to office there was ample evidence that “in practice governments develop[ed] a systematic strategic use of macroeconomic forecasts, which mostly respond[ed] to a set of different political and economic incentives given the existing conditions at the time” (Puente et al., 2007, p. 21). In some cases governments overestimated oil prices, inflation, and growth in a bid to narrow the gulf between income and expenditures, as did the Caldera administration in 1998. More commonly, governments tended to underestimate these factors, especially the price of the oil basket, which “evidenced the executive’s strategy of reducing the level of projected fiscal income as to channel the real income difference through processes that usually allow for a more discretionary use of such extra funds” (Puente et al., 2007, p. 22). The Chávez government chose the second strategy.

The two largest and most relevant funds in the context of university expansion were FONDESA, the Social Development Fund (established as an organ within PDVSA in 2002), and FONDEN, the National Development Fund (established 2005). Whereas FONDEN had a very broad mandate, FONDESA was most consequential to the universities in that it had the

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78 This was not unique to the higher education sector (other public entities like the Bolivarian Space Agency and various other organizations were also recipients) but it did have a dramatic effect on the universities because it created a parallel funding structure that made them even more dependent upon state financing.
authority to “grant all necessary payments” for the execution of programs related to infrastructure, agriculture, health and education (PDVSA, 2014a). The government’s rationale for creating these organizations and using them to distribute funds in this way was straightforward. In the long term, these transfers were to help “transform the terrible imbalances and social inequalities which, paradoxically, are present in one of the countries with the largest oil endowments on the planet” and to “promote social development through a transparent and fair distribution of oil revenues” (PDVSA, 2014b). In the short term, they enabled the state to channel resources quickly to entities that may have suddenly or unexpectedly required more funding than was allocated in the annual budget, such as in the case of emergencies or natural disasters. This was intended to allow the state to be responsive to the organizations in question, to distribute the funds with a minimum of red tape, and to monitor exactly where the funds went.

For critics, on the other hand, the development funds were anything but transparent or fair. Because “PDVSA could now disburse funds locally and internationally without reporting to the Central Bank or the National Assembly and bypassing local elected officials […] PDVSA suddenly became a key source of direct, unaccountable spending for the central government” (Corrales and Penfold, 2011, p. 80). Transparency International’s Venezuelan branch has been critical of the National Assembly for the scarcity of information provided about the additional (discretionary) credits online79 (Heywood, 2013), and the opposition also challenged their use even while recognizing that it was necessary for the universities to access them. In the context of the recentralization of subnational political power, the use of these funds can be considered alongside the conditional cash transfer programs that Dickovick and Eaton (2013) identify as

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79 In 2011, for example, the government reported that it authorized 177 additional credits, while non-governmental organization Transparency Venezuela stated that the Assembly in fact approved 217 credits (a difference of over 30 million bolívares), amounting to 82 percent of the approved budget for that year (Transparencia Venezuela, 2012).
part of a policy-based recentralization strategy meant to increase the central government’s power relative to subnational governments or institutions.

Regardless of their controversial status, between 2004 and 2009 ONAPRE consistently and significantly underestimated discrepancies between real and estimated oil prices, the most important factor in budgetary forecasting given Venezuela’s dependence on petroleum. This underestimation resulted in considerable surplus revenue generated by PDVSA and reserved for the executive branch to use at its discretion, producing an overall revenue surplus of approximately 20 percent annually (Corrales & Penfold, 2011, p. 80) and roughly $120 billion USD between 2003 and 2011 (Rodríguez et al., 2012, p. 9). The diversion of these funds into the higher education system by means of additional credits became an important source of additional resources for the Ministry, composing as much as 25 percent of all higher education expenditures in 2006. The combination of budgeted transfers and additional credits brought total higher education spending to 2.37 percent of GDP by expenditures, the highest at any point in the thirteen years in question.

Because of inherently discretionary nature of these additional credits, it would be reasonable to assume that they would be more frequently used as a sort of populist salve in periods of rising political competition or non-electoral contention. Once more, there appears to be only a weak relationship. For example, although the additional credits had a minimal role in 2007 (the year of major protests against the government’s decision not to renew the terrestrial broadcast licence of a popular television station, followed several months later by a controversial constitutional referendum), they were much more important in 2008, when competition and contestation were low. The critical pattern during this phase is therefore the overall increasing importance of the
credits, not how much spending varied from year to year depending upon events in the political sphere.

Figure 3.11. Projected and Total Higher Education Spending, 1999-2012

![Graph showing projected and total higher education spending from 1999 to 2012.](image)

Source: Author's calculations based on MPPEU (2004-2012) and United Nations (2011, 2013). "Total expenditures as proportion of GDP" consists of budgeted expenditures and the additional credits awarded in each fiscal year. I thank Al Berry at the University of Toronto for his assistance with these calculations.

The Asymmetrical Distribution of Funds

Beyond the issue of additional credits in and of themselves, there is a larger question about how state funds were distributed to different types of institutions. Whereas overall state funding as a proportion of GDP did not follow a clear curve, transfers to public universities clearly declined as the proportion of funds allocated to “affiliated entities” such as the Bolivarian Missions and other municipalization programs rose. Public universities received 71 percent of all higher education spending in 2004, but by 2009 they received only 53 percent. In 2007 and 2008, public universities as a class of institutions received less than half of the total amount spent within the public higher education system, with most of the rest going to the affiliated entities.
Overall spending on colleges and technical institutes also fell during this period (see Figure 3.12). 80

The declining funding of public universities relative to the affiliated entities is important for three reasons. First, this trend shows a clear departure from long-term historical patterns wherein public universities received the vast majority of expenditures funnelled to the higher education system. The decision to privilege post-secondary education outside of universities marked an unprecedented shift in the entire three hundred year history of the public higher education system. These numbers underscore the government’s wish to prioritize those programs affiliated with municipalization policies, including the Missions and University Villages, which provided “university education” but which were not actual universities. The primary recipients of government spending were other, non-university providers of higher education. In this sense, higher education spending illustrated Chávez's acquiescence to the "populist temptation" in which executive leaders used "the new natural-resources income for short-term consumption

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80 The Ministry of University Education itself experienced some small gains in the amount it reserved for itself to carry out its work, but the affiliated entities were the primary recipients of these increases.
rather than long-term investment" (Mazzuca, 2013, p. 111). Second, this funding shift occurred within a context where, even amid the prioritization of the auxiliary programs, new universities were still being created (six, including the Bolivarian University, between 2004 and 2009). The overall resources going to public universities therefore not only shrank in absolute terms, but the pool of claimants — the autonomous and experimental universities — became larger. For institutions that are almost exclusively financed by the state, this climate of increasing scarcity was of significant concern. Finally, of course, the Ministry of Higher Education and the office of the president directly supervised these affiliated entities. They were neither autonomous nor well institutionalized, but instead direct manifestations of manipulable state power, material expressions of the state’s fiscal capacity that lacked any formal or de facto autonomous power relative to the state.

The changing contours of higher education spending in Venezuela during this second stage of reform became a source of great friction between actors within the university community and representatives of the state and government. Many figures within the university system viewed this change in funding patterns as a punitive strategy intentionally designed to incapacitate (or "asphyxiate," in the words of Central University Vice-Rector Nicolás Bianco [personal interview, 2012]) the autonomous universities, which by this point had emerged as a strong source of opposition to Chávez, the Fifth Republic Movement, and the Bolivarian process more generally. For almost every person who spoke with me about the question of university financing, the increasing importance of these discretionary funds had a crude political rationale: to control the public universities, and the autonomous universities in particular. By making the universities increasingly reliant upon non-renewable discretionary funds controlled by the president rather than more predictable and transparent budgetary channels, they argued, the state
parched the universities and undermined their ability to engage in the long-term financial planning characteristic of the financial autonomy guaranteed in the 1970 Universities Law. Economist and former UCV administrative vice-rector Humberto García Larralde (personal interview, 2012), for example, had a very stark interpretation of the fiscal strategy:

> It [the government] has introduced a new way of controlling or demoralizing the university, which is approving the budget for only something like half or less of what the university needs, and then through the year, in a very drop-by-drop way, it gives here, it gives there, and it tantalizes the universities: ‘if you behave well, of course we might give you more.’ But they never really give you what you want. So it's a way of demoralizing and imposing its decisions. Besides the fact that in absolute terms the real budget has been receding, you have a practice which is very negative in terms of impeding the capacity of the university to plan, because if you're not sure of receiving the budget at the beginning of the year or at a certain month, then you won't approve the plans that you should have approved. You put them on hold, and of course that's going to affect the university.

For García Larralde, the state's budgetary approach is indicative of a strategy that Corrales and Penfold (2007) describe as “the politics of polarize and punish,” whereby “the government would target institutions almost one at a time, attempting to strip each of power in turn. The opposition would protest, and the government would answer by becoming more hard-line and exclusionary” (Corrales and Penfold, 2007, p. 101). His comments also highlight the interaction of university autonomy and capacity, for by restricting distribution of material resources in this way, the Ministry simultaneously rendered the universities' formal financial autonomy almost irrelevant; the power of these institutions to make decisions about the distribution of resources meant little if they did not have the basic resources to fund their academic and administrative operations in the first place.
I witnessed a manifestation of this conflict over the budget at a protest in July 2012, when several hundred students, professors, authorities, and sympathizers from autonomous universities (the Central University, the University of Carabobo, the University of the Andes, the Eastern University), experimental universities (Lisandro Alvarado Central Western University, Libertador Pedagogical University, and Simón Bolivar University, all of which have some measure of de facto autonomy), and private institutions (Andrés Bello Catholic University), as well as non-university higher education institutions like the Caracas Pedagogical Institute, gathered at the Central University to bring attention to what they vehemently argued was inadequate financing of the university system. While this was a smaller protest than many previously, it showed that political theatre was alive and well. A group of students from the University of Carabobo dragged what seemed to be cattle bones through the university courtyard and Caracas streets as demonstrators marched to the National Assembly, a comment on what they viewed to be the government’s starvation of the national universities. Others — predominantly professors, and some executive authorities — carried signs and banners that expressed their frustration. For example, members of the faculty association at Francisco de Miranda Experimental University carried a banner that pictured then-Minister Yadira Córdova with an elongated nose meant to invoke Pinocchio and the slogans “Yadira Córdova non grata,” “anti-university,” and “anti-unionist.” Similarly, the faculty association from Libertador Pedagogical University rallied behind a banner that read “university salaries are deteriorating. With this, no one survives!!! We are in crisis.”

Bolivarian state and government elites, of course, consider this critique nonsense. Additional credits were not unique to the higher education system, and provided important injections of cash

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81 While I observed this event in Stage 3 of reform, not Stage 2 as presented here, this protest was representative of many others chronicled in secondary sources and other accounts of higher education reform in Venezuela.
to public institutions above and beyond what was allocated in the budget. These discretionary
funds ought to be received warmly and appreciatively, they held. At the same time, and
irrespective of whether this figured into the official state narrative, lay supporters of the
government did view the funding strategies as an indirect response to perceptions that the
autonomous universities were corrupt institutions that mismanaged state funds by channelling
them into their own discretionary accounts. The slogan “cuentas claras,” or clear accounts, was
the rallying cry for those who accuse the Central University authorities in particular of using the
budget to reproduce their privilege and status by inappropriately diverting funds to privately
managed foundations. Several people I interviewed (chavista and otherwise) alleged that the
authorities at the Central University and other autonomous universities rent out university
facilities for private events and pocket the money for themselves rather than putting it into the
coffers of the institution. In this way, the traditional claim to university autonomy was used to
“hide” from accountability (Rengel, personal interview, 2012; Gerdel, personal interview, 2012).
Requiring universities to ask the state to fund specific initiatives was, for these individuals, a
way to ensure better transparency about how these institutions — institutions that were deeply
embedded in the corporatist structure of the puntofijismo and which were still widely perceived
to be defenders of the Fourth Republic — were using public resources.

Between the increased use of additional credits and the overall decrease in funding to public
universities, the contours of higher education spending in Venezuela changed considerably
during the second stage of higher education reform. Much more could be written about the
financing of higher education in Venezuela during this period, particularly with respect to the
poor relationship between the universities and the government. My goal in bringing this issue up

82 After Hugo Chávez died, the National Assembly approved an investigation into alleged irregularities that occurred
under the watch of Central University rector Cecilia García Arocha.
here is only to highlight how the universalization programs implemented between 2003 and 2009 were facilitated by the redirection of state expenditures away from the public universities and toward the “affiliated entities” within the higher education system. The implementation of these ambitious universalization initiatives depended less upon consistent increases in overall higher education spending than upon changes in how resources were allocated, both in terms of distributive mechanisms (budgets, additional credits, and discretionary funds) and the types of institutions that were prioritized as recipients (Bolivarian Missions and other programs overseen by the state). As I show in the following section, these dynamics only intensified in the next stage of higher education reform.

Stage 3: Institutional Transformation and the Prominence of Discretionary Funding Strategies: 2010-2012

The policy and organizational context created by municipalization and the Bolivarian Missions culminated in the final stage of higher education universalization in the Chávez era. This was not a new phase of government policy, but rather a new phase of implementation. Based on plans to turn university institutes of technology (IUTs) into experimental universities, a process formalized within Mission Alma Mater in 2009, the third phase of reform focused specifically on increasing the number of public universities in various subnational regions. This plan was enacted in 2010 and by the end of 2012, the Ministry of University Education had turned eleven IUTs in ten states into regional polytechnic universities, more than half of the total number of universities established during the previous two stages combined (see Figure 3.13). Whereas the first stage consisted primarily of designing the municipalization framework, and the second of implementing the Bolivarian Missions, the third stage marked the most rapid period of growth for the public university sector. The accomplishments during this phase occurred due to the further concentration of power in the Ministry of University Education relative to entities
within the university sector, a dramatic increase in the use of additional credits relative to standard budgetary transfers, and a much greater reliance upon existing infrastructure than in the previous two stages of reform.

*Declining Ministerial Cohesion and the Absorption of OPSU*

By the time the third stage of higher education reform began, conflicts over the perceived legislative violation of university autonomy in relation to specific public universities (the subject of the next chapter) had become a major point of contention and virtually overshadowed what was happening within the ministerial and bureaucratic realms. Nevertheless, the balance of institutional autonomy continued to shift in favour of the executive branch even as cohesion within the educational bureaucracy declined. Rapid ministerial turnover in both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of University Education indicated the growing weakness of the state in educational affairs. Héctor Navarro, the Minister of Higher Education until 2004, was appointed Minister of Education in April 2008. When he left in June 2010 he was replaced by Jennifer Gil Laya, a journalist with a background in other ministries but without experience in
the education sector. In turn, Maryanne Hanson left her position in the Ministry of Science and Technology to replace Gil in February 2011.

Stability within the Ministry of Higher Education was not much better. In February 2010 Edgardo Ramírez, a professor of international studies at the Central University, replaced Luis Acuña as minister. Ramírez, the first higher education minister without a doctorate to hold the post, was considered by many to be a radical and close ideological compatriot of President Chávez, and someone who was committed to making universities active participants in the political transition toward twenty-first century socialism. Chávez was not content to limit Ramírez to only that role, however. Approximately two weeks after he replaced Acuña as Minister, OPSU Director Antonio Castejón\(^{83}\) resigned, and Ramírez was appointed in his place. With Ramírez’s dual appointment the distinction between OPSU and the Ministry became almost nonexistent. As minister, Ramírez already presided over the National Universities Council, the still formally autonomous body for university representation. As director of OPSU, he gained the additional responsibility of providing technical assistance to the CNU in accordance with national development plans. Even though the 1970 Universities Law specified that the director of OPSU had the right to speak at the CNU but not to vote (Art. 19), this dual appointment effectively eliminated the procedural autonomy of OPSU from the state. The same figure occupied the two most important decision-making positions in the higher education sector.

Ramírez lasted less than a year as University Education Minister and Director of OPSU before he was replaced, in January 2011, by Yadira Córdova, the fifth and final person to hold the position in the thirteen years in question. Córdova was a dentistry professor, the former National Director of Education and Research at the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance (1995), and Minister of Science and Technology (2003-2007). In 2007 she was appointed the

\(^{83}\) Castejón was a former vice-rector from the University of Zulia, and was appointed OPSU Director in 2007.
Table 3.2. Venezuelan Educational Ministers and Directors of OPSU, 1999-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministers of Education</th>
<th>Ministers of Higher Education</th>
<th>OPSU Directors</th>
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<td>Maryanne Hanson (February 2011 - January 2014)</td>
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Rector of the Bolivarian University, a post she held until Chávez assigned her to the university education portfolio. As was the case with Ramírez, shortly after becoming minister she was also appointed the director of OPSU. This further solidified the fusion of the Ministry and OPSU, a situation that was initially described as being a temporary fix. Córdova remained in both of these positions until after Chávez’s death in 2013, and did not undertake any significant reforms of the organization of the educational bureaucracy or adjacent organizations like OPSU. As demonstrated in the following chapter, her ministerial energies were primarily focused on grappling with the increasingly rebellious autonomous universities.

*Electoral Competition, Economic Contraction, and Declining Higher Education Expenditures*

The third stage of higher education reform, 2010-2012, marked the renewed relevance of institutionalized political competition. The National Assembly election scheduled for September 2010 stimulated the revival of the party opposition that had boycotted the previous poll in 2005, and the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), a coalition of primarily centrist and centre-right parties, vowed to mount its best challenge to the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The fact that opposition parties were committed to staying in the race meant that the PSUV
would almost certainly suffer losses in the National Assembly, and raised the possibility that those losses could be substantial. It is plausible, then, that there might be greater correlation between state spending during this phase of higher education reform than in the previous stage, where competition was quite low; directing resources to important social policy arenas had the potential to be a straightforward way to remind the population — or at least the government’s electoral base — that its access to university education and other public goods depended on the continuation of the Bolivarian political project.

Data drawn from Venezuela’s national accounts and reports by the Ministry of University Education show precisely the opposite outcome. The effects of the recession that began in late 2008 hit Venezuela hardest in 2010, when rates of GDP growth contracted, total annual GDP in current prices shrank by almost a third, and the country continued to slide into debt (Weisbrot and Johnston, 2012; World Bank, 2014a). Overall educational spending as a percent of social spending and of real public spending in education both dropped, and budgetary transfers plunged from 1.58 percent in 2008 to 1.05 percent in 2010. Even the additional credits could not salvage that year; although they added 28 percent to total expenditures, spending hit its lowest point since before Chávez took office. It is quite conceivable that the government wanted to increase spending in the higher education arena as a way to accrue more electoral support in advance of the legislative election, but it did not have the fiscal resources to do so short of radically deprioritizing another sector.

The PSUV managed to win a majority in the October election, yet another electoral victory for the government but an underwhelming performance nevertheless. The party won 96 of the available 162 seats but lost the supermajority previously held by the Fifth Republic Movement. Even more sobering was the fact that the PSUV received only one percent more of the popular

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84 Three seats are reserved for indigenous representatives.
vote than the MUD. This was a sure signal for the Chávez government that the October 2012 presidential race would not be easy, particularly as the coalition organized around Henrique Capriles, the young, well educated lawyer who had been the mayor of Baruta, governor of Miranda, and founder of the Primero Justicia party. Competition was intense, in part because of Capriles’ initially conciliatory tone (he notably indicated that if elected he would continue to fund the Bolivarian Missions [Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, 9 September 2012]), and the campaign was the hardest one for Chávez to date as he tried to balance electoral politics with his declining health.

Fortunately for the government, the Venezuelan economy began to improve, and oil basket prices reached their highest point yet in 2012 (OPEC, 2014). In the first quarter of 2012, “the economy passed the level of real GDP that it had reached before the most recent recession” (Weisbrot and Johnston, 2012, p. 12). Total transfers to the higher education system from the central state and extra-budgetary channels skyrocketed, with money from additional credits and discretionary funds swelling to equal the same amount formally stipulated in that year’s budget law, effectively doubling the total resources distributed by the state but halving its accountability to ostensibly representative institutions (see Figure 3.11 earlier in this chapter). While this allowed the government to point to its spending commitments, the increasing reliance on additional credits meant that FONDESVA, FONDEN and PDVSA first rivalled and then displaced the Central Bank and the Ministry as the primary sources of financial support, giving the president even more control over the distribution of resources than the Ministry already had. The situation continued to be grim for the public universities as well, which received only 34 percent of all higher education expenditures in 2012. In contrast, the affiliated entities received 55 percent. Finally, although it is true that spending on Venezuelan higher education as a
proportion of GDP did rebound after 2010, it never fully recovered, resting at 1.72 percent in 2011 and 2012.

The Transformation of University Institutes of Technology into Regional Polytechnic Universities

In this context of fiscal fragility, the state needed to find other solutions to achieve its universalization goals. As outlined above, beginning in 2010, the year of such great economic contraction, the state began the process of transforming existing technical institutes into accredited regional experimental (non-autonomous) polytechnic universities. This strategy was one of the most important elements identified in the framework established by the Alma Mater Mission, and had been previously mentioned as a matter of “modernization” in the 2001-2007 National Development Plan. Approximately 70 days before the 2010 legislative election, Minister Ramírez announced the creation of seven universities, six of which were the first regional polytechnic institutions established by presidential decree in the states of Apure, Aragua, Barinas, Lara, Miranda, and Táchira. The seventh university was not an outcome of Mission Alma Mater but had a similar origin story: the Ministry turned the Military Academy of Venezuela (first established in 1810 and the alma mater of presidents Medina, Pérez Jiménez, and Chávez) into the Bolivarian Military University. In April 2012, six months before the presidential election, Minister Córdova turned a further five IUTs into accredited regional polytechnic universities in the states of Mérida, Monagas, Portuguesa, and Sucre (Cumaná and Carupano). In this way, the state was not simply appropriating the organizational and administrative blueprint of the experimental university, but was taking specific institutions with established academic and material infrastructure and turning them into bona fide public, state-supervised universities — a far less costly endeavour than building and staffing entirely new universities. This strategy allowed the state to prioritize fiscal transfers to the Missions and
additional entities while still forging ahead with the universalization of institutional university education.

The push to create so many new universities within such a small period of time, especially given the ongoing economic instability, draws attention to the strategic choices of reformers in a context of growing political competition. With Chávez frequently publicly absent, the eleven territorial universities that were created between 2010 and 2012 can be interpreted as a final show of force to reassure his supporters that the Bolivarian revolution was proceeding apace even in the face of significant uncertainty about the viability of the political movement under the shadow of a very ill leader. During this third phase of reform, competition did not have a fiscal solution as much as it did an infrastructural one; the required resources already existed, and the major organizational and administrative changes required by this transition were relatively low-cost. Maintaining spending on the Missions and adding eleven new institutions to the roster of Venezuelan universities reinforced the state’s commitment to the universalization of institutionalized formal higher education and helped secure electoral support for the president. In October of 2012, Chávez was re-elected president with 55 percent of the vote, 11 percent more than his competitor, Henrique Capriles.

**Autonomy, Capacity, and Strategic Choice in the Universalization of Venezuelan Higher Education**

There is no question that the Venezuelan higher education system experienced tremendous change between 1999 and 2012. With Hugo Chávez as chief executive, state elites designed and implemented a range of policies that increased access to public university education as part of a larger intended transition to twenty-first century socialism. Over the span of thirteen years the size of the public university sector swelled by 22 new universities and 7 university technical institutes, to say nothing of the two Bolivarian Missions that further incorporated scores of
additional students into the higher education system. Whatever the quality of education or the sustainability about such rapid expansion, by the time of the 2012 presidential election Chávez was able to proudly point to the process of university transformation as a great (if unfinished) achievement.

The specific form of the universalization initiatives — the creation of new programs and institutions under state supervision — was the outcome of the state’s relative autonomy and capacity compared to that of other social forces, particularly those that opposed the reforms, and of the strategic funding choices made by reformers. The availability of power resources to reformers and opponents varied at each stage of the reform process and therefore conditioned the decisions of key actors. The state autonomy established in the 1999 constitution and further facilitated by the oil boom of 2003 was crucial during the agenda-setting, design, and adoption stages of reform, allowing Bolivarian reformers to plan an extraordinarily ambitious universalization program intended to transform the entire higher education system.

The state's autonomy relative to the higher education system in particular was reinforced by the use of several bureaucratic recentralization strategies that progressively concentrated decision-making and implementation power in the hands of the executive branch and the president in particular. Repeated organizational and personnel changes within the Ministry of University Education reduced ministerial independence relative to the president but increased their decision-making and implementation power over non-state governance bodies. Such was the case when the positions of Minister of Higher Education and Director of the Office of University Sector Planning were assumed by the same individual in 2010, and when the Ministry assumed the prerogative of evaluating the appropriateness of proposals for new universities, a process traditionally reserved for the National Universities Council (see Figures 3.14 and 3.15). The
critical point is not that the organizational location of OPSU and the CNU relative to the executive branch changed, but that they effectively lost the power to make decisions that significantly shaped the higher education system as a whole. The accumulation of more state power meant a concomitant loss for these previously autonomous organizations, reflecting the state's larger strategy of bypassing other institutions or organizations that would not support or easily acquiesce to its demands.

This increasing concentration of autonomy in the state vis-à-vis the university sector gave reformers considerable discretion when it came to deciding what form universalization should take, especially during the first stage of expansion (1999-2002), when capable ministers and technocrats set the reform agenda and established the basic parameters of reform. For all of their enthusiasm and expertise, however, the initiatives simply would have never succeeded but for sufficient organizational and material state capacity. Reformers did draw upon symbolic resources as they framed the reforms, especially in relation to the Bolivarian Missions, but the successful implementation of the universalization programs depended upon the increased availability of fiscal resources incoming to the state due to rising international oil prices and growing state control over the oil industry.

Soaring oil rents and increasingly concentrated state ownership of the national oil industry led to growth in the state's overall wealth, but there was not a simple causal relationship between rising oil income and state spending in the higher education system, nor was spending clearly affected by political competition or contestation. This is not to discount the role of state expenditures in universalization reforms, but simply to caution against a view of universalization reforms as predominantly tied to electoral cycles. More critical was the manner in which these funds were transferred to and distributed within the higher education system. The distribution of
additional credits (even as the state’s overall material capacity declined) assisted the state in channelling money to programs directly under the executive’s control, such as the Bolivarian Missions, while universities became increasingly dependent upon one-time, non-renewable
transfers awarded by the chief executive. In this way, even independently of electoral cycles, the universalization programs can be considered part of a populist spending strategy undertaken by the Chávez administration in a variety of other policy arenas (Hawkins, 2003; Hawkins, 2010). This diversion of funds from the public (especially autonomous) universities weakened their power relative to the state while simultaneously increasing the power of the executive branch in the higher education arena.

In addition to fiscal resources, the state had another source of material capacity that proved essential to its achievements in the higher education arena. This is especially pertinent in the context of university expansion, not the universalization of higher education writ large. Patterns of university expansion between 1999 and 2012 clearly reflect a form of institutional path dependency, where “the institutional pattern — once adopted — delivers increasing benefits with its continued adoption, and thus over time it becomes more and more difficult to transform the pattern or select previously available options, even if these alternative options would have been more ‘efficient’” (Mahoney, 2000, p. 508). In a path dependent trajectory, sequences of institutional development become self-reinforcing, and departure from those patterns becomes more costly.

In this case, reformers' decisions to base reform efforts on the model of the experimental university reflect considerable path dependent institutional development. Fernando Coronil (1997), writing in (and of) the pre-Chávez period, noted that “the tension between the state’s monetary abundance and its structural limits creates a tendency for policy goals to be inflated […] and for state planners to favour strategies that minimize their risks and preserve existing arrangements. Policy makers cultivated the ability to reproduce the present while claiming the future” (p. 282). The Chávez government may have come into a depreciated public system yet it
also inherited a ready-made model of a state-supervised (in other words, non-autonomous) university it could use to its advantage. The availability of this model and its decades-long prominence within the public higher education sector meant that it could be easily used by a state intent on increasing its influence within the university system. The universities created after 1998 were established within a context where traditions of internal governance were institutionalized and where expectations around the boundaries of state-university relations were normalized. The state therefore did not have to spend considerable time and resources drafting plans for the timely organization, administration, and supervision of a wholly new type of institution, allowing reformers to bypass the major controversy that would almost certainly have erupted had they tried to introduce a new model of the university, let alone one that was explicitly oriented around the task of socialist transformation. The existing institutions and systemic norms inherited by the state functioned as critical resources that enabled university expansion, and it was rational for the government to continue to use them.

The experimental template became especially important during and after 2010, the most extensive period of university expansion. In fact, during this stage state reformers not only used the same institutional model, but also used readily existing infrastructure. Eleven of the 13 universities created between 2010 and 2012 had previously been large university technical institutes, which were transformed into experimental polytechnic universities via the Alma Mater framework. This strategy was tremendously cost-effective because the material, administrative and academic resources already existed, allowing the state to promote a perception of institutional abundance with very little expense on its part. Without these pre-existing IUTs, and even in spite of the radically increased importance of additional credits during the 2010-2012
period, it is highly unlikely that the state would have been able to accomplish the creation of eleven brand new universities in only three years.

On balance, then, it is clear that no amount of state autonomy would have been able to compensate for a lack of material capacity in the universalization process. Without money and infrastructure all of the state’s ambitious plans would have led to little more than dreams of transformation. Autonomy was necessary for the state to craft universalization strategies and decide how they should be achieved, as it allowed the state to bypass potential sources of organizational opposition during the design and adoption processes. Autonomy was not, however, a sufficient condition for implementation. Instead, the successful implementation of these programs was ultimately due to the fact that the state had the capacity to create new institutions and transform old ones in this spirit of municipalization. Without the capacity to implement the project of university transformation, unfinished though it was by the time of Chávez’s death, Bolivarian reformers simply would not have had such success.

In the larger context of state-society relations, the case of higher education universalization in Venezuela between 1999 and 2012 not only emphasizes the importance of capacity as a key power resource, but it also highlights the profoundly recursive relations between the state and the public university sector. The expansion of the university sector was both a cause and consequence of state power — or to put it differently, an illustration of the mutually transformative dynamic of state-university interaction. On the one hand, the new public universities were created by a state with enough autonomy and capacity relative to other social forces to be able to do so. In this way the higher education system is an indicator of the state’s infrastructural power, the capacity of the state to enforce its policy through territory. On the other hand, the fact that all of the new public universities were experimental (and all the new programs
under the direction of the state) rather than autonomous meant that as the sector expanded empirically, so too did the state’s power relative to the formally autonomous universities. In the university sector in particular, not simply the higher education system as a whole, the state’s power became self-reinforcing. The expansion of the university education system, then, was not just about the number of new universities popping up across Venezuela or the increase in enrolment or matriculation rates. It was also about the cumulative concentration and centralization of the state’s administrative, territorial, and political power and influence. ‘Municipalization’ proved to be far more about the territorial expansion of higher education than it was the decentralization of power to subnational states or municipalities.

Joel Migdal (1994, p. 13) argues that states and scholars both have a tendency to overestimate the extent of state capacity. “Wittingly or unwittingly,” he writes, social scientists who “exaggerate the capabilities of the state become part of the state’s project to present itself as invincible.” The attention given in this chapter to the ways in which economic and political instability constrained state capacity should make clear that the Venezuelan state was not invincible, even if many universalization objectives were implemented. The next chapter illustrates further vulnerabilities in state capacity, this time in the legislative arena. If the case of universalization can be considered a success, at least in part, the 2001 Organic Education Law, the 2009 Organic Education Law, and the 2010 Universities Law demonstrate notable state weakness. The state may have bypassed the National Universities Council and created only experimental institutions, but when it began to encroach on the internal organizational and administrative autonomy of the autonomous universities it faced blistering resistance that significantly impeded further reform.
Chapter 4

The Moribund State: The Limits of Legislative Reform

Chapter 3 described how the Chávez administration changed the landscape of Venezuelan higher education by implementing universalization policies that skirted around existing institutions in favour of new ones under the direct supervision of the state. This strategy allowed the state to minimize interactions with oppositional social forces, to bypass sources of opposition, and to implement a series of ambitious access reforms. To truly transform the university system, however, the state had to contend with the autonomous universities, institutions that formed the backbone of public university education and with which, as described in Chapter 2, it shared a long and occasionally combative history. However, because these institutions were formally autonomous, which is to say that they had substantial de jure power to organize and administer their own affairs, the state required a different strategy for engagement than it did when it designed and implemented the Bolivarian Missions and experimental universities. This put reformers in a dilemma, for as Ciccariello-Maher (2013) asks, “how could a radical leader intervene toward the positive transformation of the university without appearing to violate its autonomy?” (121). In a series of valiant attempts to do just that, reformers turned to the legislative realm, introducing three new laws intended to change the national higher education system as a whole: the 2001 Organic Education Law, the 2009 Organic Education Law, and the 2010 University Education Law. By altering the foundational policies governing Venezuelan higher education, reformers hoped, the autonomous universities would be indirectly compelled to adapt to the changing national legal framework.

As defined in the 1999 Constitution, organic laws are “those enacted to organize public powers or develop constitutional rights, and those which serve as a normative framework for other laws” (Art. 203).
This strategy of legislative engagement turned out to be significantly less successful than state and government elites hoped, for not one of the three pieces of legislation were fully implemented. The 2001 Organic Education Law was unanimously approved upon its first reading in the National Assembly but the president informally removed it from the legislative agenda by publicly expressing his disapproval prior to a second reading. In 2009 the National Assembly tried to pass another Organic Education Law, one that was far more ambitious than the version that failed in 2001, and which this time president Chávez signed. However, the autonomous universities refused to abide by the new provisions governing the state-university relationship, even upon judicial retaliation, and pertinent parts of the law still remain to be implemented as of April 2016. Finally, the National Assembly passed the 2010 University Education Law, another ambitious document firmly situating the universities within the context of twenty-first century socialism, only for President Chávez to 'veto' the bill 11 days later. If universalization policies reinforced the image of a muscular, responsive state committed to social transformation, the difficulty the Chávez government experienced in achieving legislative reforms showed its vulnerability, revealing a state that was, at least in this policy arena, less magical than it was moribund.

This chapter explores why the Chávez government was ultimately unable to achieve its goal of university transformation through legislative means. I discuss the three cases in chronological order, beginning with the 2001 Organic Education Law before turning to the 2009 Organic Education Law and, finally, the 2010 University Education Law. I conduct within-case analyses of each stage of the reform process, exploring how autonomy and capacity impacted the strategic choices of reformers during the agenda-setting, design, adoption, and implementation phases of each bill. As expected, differences in the relative balance of power between the state and
university sector account for variation in the final outcome of each case. I also find that the relative importance of autonomy and capacity varied according to the stage of reform in question. In 2001 the distribution of autonomy and capacity between the state and social forces contributed to a final draft that was inclusive of a range of educational interests, but the early concentration of power in the executive, the absence of an effective interpretive frame, and the weak capacity of social forces to respond allowed the president to discard the bill at his leisure. In 2009, the state had more autonomy and capacity relative to the university sector during the agenda-setting, design and adoption phases, but the national universities' combination of formal university autonomy and organizational capacity enabled them to resist the full internal implementation of the law. Finally, by 2010, the state had still more institutional autonomy than the universities in the agenda-setting and design stages, but fortunes had turned for the university sector, which was able to generate sufficient organizational capacity to sustain challenges to the legislation until the president decided to veto the bill. As a result, of the three bills, only the 2009 Organic Education Law was fully enshrined in law, even if to this day it remains unapplied within the autonomous universities.

**The 2001 Organic Education Law**

*Setting the Legislative Agenda*

Educational reform was a prominent topic in Chávez’s 1998 presidential campaign, an issue he frequently emphasized alongside other social policy concerns (Wilpert, 2007). Legislative reform was an obvious arena to prioritize, for there was widespread agreement throughout Venezuelan society that the national education system needed to be improved and updated to attend to the challenges following the economic crisis of the 1980s and the implosion of the political system in the 1990s. As noted in Chapter 3, this was particularly the case with higher
education, which lawmakers saw as especially urgent given the extent to which the Venezuelan economy relied upon skilled technicians and professionals. Neither the 1970 Universities Law nor the 1980 Organic Education Law could sufficiently attend to the major structural and institutional changes Venezuela experienced as a result of the combined political and economic strife, and various governments tried to pass new higher education laws in 1984, 1988, 1994, 1997, and finally in June 1998, only six months before Chávez was elected. Unlike in the case of the universalization reforms, however, the legislative branch was less insulated from social forces, and reformers in this arena therefore had to take other political interests and preferences into consideration from the very beginning.

The balance of power between the state and social forces changed quickly after Chávez was inaugurated. With the promulgation of the new constitution in 1999, the result of a Constituent Assembly dominated by Chávez supporters, Venezuela gained “the most heavily presidentialist constitution in contemporary Latin America” (Corrales and Penfold, 2007, p. 100). Key features of this new constitution included the extension of presidential term limits from five to six years, the abolishment of the senate, and the assumption of a range of new powers for the executive, including the ability to promote military officers (Corrales and Penfold, 2007; Ellner, 2010). Perhaps most importantly, Article 203 allowed the National Assembly, with three fifths of the vote, to delegate legislative powers to the executive branch, allowing the president to bypass the (now unicameral) National Assembly by decree or referendum (López Maya, 2011, p. 226). Chávez made quick use of this prerogative when he passed two such Enabling Laws, one in September 1999, and another in November 2001, which “established majority government ownership of all mixed companies in charge of primary oil operations” and gave the state the authority to expropriate unused land (Ellner, 2008, p. 113). The use of two Enabling Acts in just

86 See Chapter 2 for a brief overview of these attempts at legislative reform.
two years indicated a readiness to use all available policy resources to consolidate the Bolivarian project and to concentrate personal political authority by blurring the separation of powers.\textsuperscript{87}

As much as this constitutional “re-foundation” (Segura and Bejarano, 2004, p. 224) formally invested the state and executive branch with considerably more power relative to the previous constitutional order, many independent social actors and institutions remained highly organized and invested in trying to shape the new political context. The April 2002 coup attempt against Chávez, the December 2002-February 2003 oil strike, the 2003 oil boom, and the major statist policy reforms which progressively increased state autonomy relative to domestic and international actors had yet to occur when the bill was being designed in 2001. This meant that representatives of the governing party, the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), had to interact with various civil society organizations during the design process of initial attempts at legislative reform.\textsuperscript{88} Organizations like the Venezuelan Federation of Chambers and Associations of Commerce and Production (FEDECAMERAS) and the Venezuelan Workers’ Confederation (CTV) remained strong, and although the party opposition was organizationally weak, it too remained diverse and vocal (Ellner, 2008, p. 113).

Within the specific sphere of state-university governance, the balance of institutional power was essentially the same as it had been before Chávez became president, although the principle of university autonomy, previously institutionalized only in the 1970 Universities Law, was newly embedded in the 1999 constitution (Art. 109). The 1970 Universities Law and 1980

\textsuperscript{87} The 1961 constitution also permitted the use of enabling laws (Art. 190.8), six of which were passed between 1961 and 1998 (Crisp, 1998).

\textsuperscript{88} The momentum for introducing new educational legislation was further supported by an institutional mechanism that emerged out of the 1999 Constituent Assembly. Article 6 of the transitional constitutional provisions required the new National Assembly to legislate on organic laws relating to indigenous populations, education, and borders within two years. In a sense the new Chávez government tied its own hands by requiring itself to attend to legislative reform. Widespread agreement about the need to update educational legislation for the twenty-first century context, not limited to but certainly including higher education, therefore cut across partisan lines and put such reform squarely on the political agenda.
Organic Education Law continued to be the primary pieces of legislation governing the country’s universities, public and private alike, maintaining the baseline of formal autonomy for these institutions during the Chávez period. These dynamics meant that the government was therefore required to take into account, though not necessarily to concede to, the interests of other actors in its initial attempts at educational transformation. The only hint of the increasing state intervention to come was Decree 1011, introduced in October 2000, which created district supervisors that had the authority to make administrative changes within public schools at the behest of the Minister of Education.

Designing the Legislation

This distribution of state-society autonomy influenced the range of participating stakeholders as they moved to replace the 1980 Organic Law. It was also complemented by a distribution of political power that encouraged, at least to some degree, coalition-building. In this early, highly competitive period of Bolivarianism in power, the MVR needed to consolidate itself as a viable party and secure as much support as it could from other actors. As Chávez slowly became less hostile to the prospect of electoral participation and the MVR became a more important vehicle for advancing Bolivarian goals, it began to include a wider range of participants than initially constituted the “clandestine” (Hawkins, 2003, p. 1141) Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 (MBR-200) from which it grew. Thus, when it became the governing party after the 2000 election, MVR deputies held a range of political opinions which were generally supportive of the Bolivarian project but which were not yet codified into a detailed party line. In 2000 the MVR held 55 percent of the seats in the legislature but only 44 percent of the popular vote, and the composition of the Assembly was still fairly heterogeneous. This distribution of power meant that it was in the political interest of the governing party, still trying to gain legitimacy in a
period of high electoral competition, to try to shore up as much support for its legislative initiatives as possible by forming alliances with other actors.\textsuperscript{89} The political opportunity structure, in other words, required a conciliatory approach from Chávez and the Fifth Republic Movement; even with increased legislative power for the president, he still needed to build a stronger base of support.

The combination of this distribution of power and a political opportunity structure that required compromise resulted in the establishment of broad lateral alliances between autonomous political parties and civil society organizations, ultimately leading to a bill that blended the interests of a diverse array of educational stakeholders. In contrast to the 2009 Organic Education Law and 2010 University Education Law that followed, both of which emerged at the sole behest of Bolivarian reformers, the 2001 Organic Law was the product of intensive negotiation between political parties and a number of autonomous civil society advocacy groups, albeit none that could be considered revolutionary.\textsuperscript{90} José Luis Farias, the MVR representative for Vargas state that spearheaded the process, demonstrated his openness to a wide range of input from other deputies and non-government actors including those part of or affiliated with Acción Democrática, which held 20 percent of the seats in the Assembly and represented, for all intents and purposes, the remnants of \textit{puntofijismo}. Under Farias’ leadership the National Assembly’s Education Commission proposed an initial draft of a new education law, one which in January 2001 was countered by a draft produced by the Assembly for Education, a civil society organization led by a long-time advocate for private education and

\textsuperscript{89} This does not mean there was widespread harmony in the political system. As discussed in the last chapter, this was the most intense period of political competition in the two Chávez administrations. However, it was in the government’s interest to find allies where it could, as it could not afford to alienate ambivalent actors.

\textsuperscript{90} Prior to the design and introduction of this law, a group of radical students, workers and professors occupied the Rectorate at the Central University to demand the reorganization of internal political power. This episode is known as the “\textit{toma},” or “takeover,” and led to the birth of the M-28 (M-28 Movement), a radical student group named after the date of a general assembly held prior to the occupation, on March 28, 2001 (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013). I could not find evidence that the M-28 or similar radical groups shaped this legislative process.
Andrés Bello Catholic University professor named Leonardo Carvajal. Working from these two documents, Farías and Carvajal developed a revised bill that satisfied both, which Farías then presented to the National Assembly in August 2001.

The draft of the Organic Education Law presented to the National Assembly in August 2001 gave Venezuela the opportunity to move into the twenty-first century global educational context. Containing a preamble which exalted famous national figures such as Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, Andrés Bello and José María Vargas, the bill outlined a comprehensive structure for all levels of public and private education covering areas as diverse as the essential role of families in educational provision (Arts. 10 and 11) to the necessity of a decentralized, regionally based approach (Art. 20). The law contained 15 articles specific to higher education, double the number contained in the 1980 law, and positioned universities as institutions at the forefront of Venezuelan (and international) knowledge production and economic development. It provided a basic statement of purpose that described higher education as responsible for contributing to sustainable development and the betterment of society (Art. 38) and drew from increasingly popular international discourses about quality assurance, institutional evaluation, and international cooperation. The 2001 bill also explicitly defined and guaranteed university autonomy, asserting that “the state recognizes university autonomy as the principle and status

91 The Assembly for Education bill received support from the Venezuelan Teachers’ Federation, the Venezuelan Chamber of Private Education, the National Association of Private Education Institutes, the College of Graduates of Education, the Venezuelan Association of Catholic Education, and the Civil Association SINERGIA (Graffe, 2005, 283).

92 Venezuela’s autonomous universities were largely uninvolved in the design process. Certainly, some rectors and professors (especially those from the private university sector), and in particular those whose professional careers revolved around the study and practice of education, were active and vocal participants within the participating civil society organizations like the Assembly for Education. However, the University Councils, rectors’ association, professors’ unions and other bodies that proved to be essential actors in the other two cases remained focused on internal and primarily academic university affairs. Students, meanwhile, were more supportive of Chávez during this early period than at any other, and saw no need to get involved in what appeared to be a harmonious process of legislative reform. In short, in 2001 the universities acted more in a consultative role than as direct protagonists, leaving the bulk of the work to MVR deputies and the various civil associations engaged in the process. Legislating was left to the legislators.
that allows professors, students and graduates of their community to search for knowledge through scientific, humanistic and technological research for the spiritual and material benefit of the nation” (Art. 49). This was the first Organic Education Law in Venezuela’s history to directly embed university autonomy into the basic framework governing education.\textsuperscript{93} 

\textit{The Introduction and Non-Adoption of the 2001 Organic Education Law}

The 2001 Organic Education Law was formally introduced to the National Assembly on August 25, when deputies read and unanimously approved it for the first time.\textsuperscript{94} With such remarkable consensus, it should have been a straightforward task to approve the bill for the second time required by the legislative process, and to send it to the president to formally sign into law. Despite the momentum evidenced by the bill’s widespread public support and positive reception in the legislature, however, it met a quick end. As soon as the bill was read in the Assembly, officials from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD), which did not participate in the design process, criticized it as “neoliberal” and plagued by multiple other flaws including insufficient technical and legal specificity, inadequate attention to participatory and democratic management, and a general lack of consideration for the democratization of knowledge and the creation of a new political culture (Graffe, 2005, pp. 286-287). In other words, these state officials interpreted the bill as an updated version of the 1980 Organic Law, not a new law that reflected the transformative social and political mission of the new government.

\textsuperscript{93} University autonomy was guaranteed in the 1970 University Law, but was not addressed in the 1980 Organic Education Law.

\textsuperscript{94} The MVR held 91 of 165 seats, with the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) providing an additional six seats in support of Chávez. Opposition parties held 45 seats between Acción Democrática (33 seats), COPEI (six seats), and Proyecto Venezuela (six seats).
Shortly after this public criticism, in an October 2001 episode of *Álo, Presidente*, the president’s personal television show,95 Hugo Chávez denounced the bill as the work of los escuálidos (‘squalid ones’), a Venezuelan colloquialism used by government supporters to refer to the opposition and a critical element of the largely class-based populist discursive frame used by Chávez until 2005 (Eastwood, 2011, p. 3). Referencing a gift recently presented to him by Chicago Cubs right fielder Sammy Sosa, Chávez announced that “if it is approved [by the legislature on its second reading], Miraflores [the presidential palace] won’t. I have Sammy Sosa’s bat ready to slam it back” (Graffe, 2005, p. 286-287). With legislators cowed, the bill was effectively banished from the parliamentary agenda.96

Chávez’s repudiation of the Organic Law is illuminating, for it indicates that the close connections that were brokered between the MVR and civil society groups during the process of drafting and introducing the bill could not compensate for internal divisions within the governing party. As noted in Chapter 3, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport was quite internally cohesive during this point, with experienced ministers and advisors in the midst of establishing the groundwork for the Bolivarian Missions and other bureaucratic reforms. However, there was evidently considerable distance between the MECD and Venezuelan legislators, who independently drafted and introduced a bill that proved so unpalatable to the executive that the president outright rejected it. The executive was reactive, and only really mattered in the reform process after the bill had already been designed. This basic disjuncture in the programmatic priorities of the governing party — the MVR deputies who supported it and the MVR cabinet ministers who did not — indicates weak organizational cohesion that ultimately sank the bill

95 Chávez also expelled the Movement Toward Socialism from the governing coalition in this eventful episode.
96 The 2009 Organic Education Law was presented by the government as a revised version of the 2001 bill, and, in this sense, “reintroduced.” However, the content of the 2001 and 2009 bills vary so much that the 2009 iteration must be considered a genuinely new bill, not simply a revised version of the 2001 draft. This is additionally addressed later in the chapter.
during the adoption stage. Chávez’s public condemnation of the law sent informal but very clear signals to MVR deputies that they should not press forward with it, despite the house’s unanimous approval following its first reading.

The National Assembly’s unanimous support of the Organic Education Law should not be read as a sign of hostility or ill will toward Chávez. After all, the MVR was the majority party, and a relatively personalistic one at that. Instead, it at least partially resulted from the absence of a unifying, strategic interpretive framework that could signal to deputies what the president expected of them. Ministerial and other executive elites did not possess a compelling symbolic frame in 2001, let alone any frames specific to education. This hampered the executive’s ability to clearly communicate with both MVR legislators and the Venezuelan public. The period in question, after the July 2000 megaelections but before the April 2002 coup attempt and the oil strike that began in December 2002, was a period of particular interpretive instability. Bolivarian elites struggled to transform the discourses that helped launch them into power into ones that could be used to govern, shifting their adversarial focus from the previous, pre-1999 frame that focused narrowly on previous party elites into one “that include[d] most of the domestic opposition” (Hawkins, 2010, 61) such as los escuálidos that Chávez referenced in his public dismissal of the bill. This discursive inconsistency or "ambiguous inclusivity" (Eastwood, 2011, p. 3) about who, exactly, constituted el pueblo, a classic populist trope, may have contributed to confusion among MVR deputies who surely thought they were achieving something laudable when they voted to approve the bill, or who at the very least had a sense that it was acceptable to work closely with the opposition. Without clarity about the boundaries of the pueblo-escuálido binary, and therefore without knowledge of the extent to which major actors from the Punto Fijo
political system could or should be excluded from participation in the new constitutional order, MVR deputies were unable to accurately predict the president's disapproval.

In the end, the draft of the Organic Education Law first read and approved in the National Assembly in August 2001 faded into obscurity, with no such comparable legislation introduced for another eight years. Yet the actions of the executive had serious short-term repercussions. Both José Luis Farías and Leonardo Carvajal were angered by what they perceived to be the audacity of presidential intervention in a strictly legislative affair. The fallout from this episode is an example of how “[Chávez’s] movement suffered continual defections as old comrades and moderate allies turned away from what they perceived to be an increasingly radical, personalistic project” (Hawkins, 2003, p. 1143; see also Corrales, 2011, p. 72). Farías, denounced by the Ministry over his leadership role in the episode, left the MVR in order to help consolidate the newly formed Solidaridad party created by other disenchanted MVR deputies opposed to the November 2000 Enabling Law. For his part, Carvajal, a staunch critic of Chávez to begin with, only hardened his resolve to fight the government. Eight months after the bill failed he publicly coauthored a letter in opposition newspaper El Universal calling for the president to leave office, and was then named Education Minister in Pedro Carmona’s short-lived cabinet during the 2002 coup attempt against Chávez (Clement, 2007, p. 195).

The 2001 Organic Education Law is especially unique in the context of the three cases of legislative reform considered in this chapter. Unlike the 2009 Education Law and 2010 University Education Law that followed, it originated at the behest of social forces and a legislative committee rather than as an initiative developed or promoted by the cabinet or state bureaucracy. Given the extent to which it was driven by civil society organizations the bill cannot be considered an example of policy failure as traditionally conceived, for its non-adoption
was at the president’s own choice rather than due to protests from social forces. Of the three cases, this law also had the least potential impact on or interaction with the university sector, which remained largely removed from each stage of the reform process. This is a case of higher education reform only in the broadest of senses. However, the way it unfolded set the precedent for future attempts at legislative reform and helps contextualize how the balance of autonomy and capacity between the state and university sector changed in 2009 and 2010. In 2001, even with the new constitution and the enabling laws, the state still had to contend with organized social forces that remained fairly autonomous and which sought to influence the design and adoption phases of reform. When the president brushed the law aside he did so against the wishes of those who helped craft it but who did not have the institutional capacity to require him to reconsider. They simply could not force the president to sign something he did not want to sign. By 2009, when the next attempt at legislative reform occurred, this balance of power had changed considerably, and the resulting strategic interactions of actors on all sides led to a much different outcome.

**The 2009 Organic Education Law**

In 2009, the prospect of replacing the 1980 Organic Education Law was again put in front of the Venezuelan public. It would be an understatement to note that much had changed in the intervening eight years since the 2001 bill was introduced. In broad terms, the distribution of power between the state and social forces characteristic of the 2001 episode had shifted substantially in favour of the state. The previous chapter detailed a number of important structural and institutional changes that concentrated power in the president, including the recurrent use of enabling laws (1999, 2000-2001, 2007-2008), the failed coup attempt against Chávez in 2002 and the failed PDVSA oil strike of 2002-2003, the 2004 recall referendum that
ended with 58 percent of voters indicating that they wanted Chávez to stay in office, the opposition boycott of parliamentary elections in 2005, and a successful constitutional referendum that removed presidential term limits in 2009. Each of these episodes invested the president with significantly more power relative to oppositional social forces.

This ongoing concentration and centralization of power was present in the educational arena too. The 2003 oil boom enhanced the material capacity of the state and facilitated the expansion of the university system, while bureaucratic changes such as the marginalization of the National Universities Council in 2005 further invested the Ministry of University Education with greater autonomy relative to the universities (see Chapter 3). The fact that the majority of these reforms were bureaucratic or institutional, and that most of them bypassed the autonomous universities, meant that actors within those universities were not particularly mobilized to engage with the Chávez administration when this new episode of legislative reform began. Humberto García Larralde, the former administrative vice-rector of the Central University introduced in Chapter 3, likened the university community’s position to the slow response of a frog in boiling water: “The baseline [of university autonomy] has been receding progressively, like the image of a frog that you put into a bucket of hot water, and you increase the temperature and at first the frog doesn't give a damn, until the water's boiling and of course there's nothing it can do. It doesn't realize it's being boiled slowly” (personal interview, 2012). In the increasingly asymmetrical balance of power between the state and social forces, the Chávez government had the upper hand, and the university community was not prepared to adequately respond.

In the context of higher education politics, these shifts in the balance of autonomy and capacity allowed the state to engineer a reform trajectory that differed from the first attempt at legislative reform in almost every way. Whereas the distribution of power between the executive
and legislative branches of the state in 2001 led elected representatives to build important alliances with autonomous civil society organizations during the agenda-setting and design processes, in 2009 a greater concentration of power in the executive allowed an ideologically and organizationally cohesive Ministry of University Education to design a bill with far less participation from civil society, particularly with respect to actors known to be oppositional. During the adoption stage the demobilized and organizationally weak opposition contested the legislation but was ultimately unable to mount an effective campaign against the proposal, and the bill became law. However, the process of implementation was not as straightforward. The autonomous universities drew upon their organizational capacity and their formal and *de facto* autonomy to resist the changes required by the new Organic Education Law, effectively evading reform. Thus, while the administration's initiative was successful in the sense that it changed the basic legal foundation governing Venezuelan education at large, it did not achieve its desired effects within the autonomous universities.

*Setting the Agenda and Designing the Legislation*

Unlike in 2001, when the agenda-setting process was initiated by demands of civil society and a government enabled by a constitutional transitional provision, the impetus for the 2009 Organic Education Law came strictly from the state. The calls for reform that stimulated the Organic Law in 2001 faded not because the standing 1980 law was suddenly rehabilitated as redeemable but because the opposition feared that any new legislation would invest far more power in the state by siphoning it further from social (educational) forces. When reform was put back on the agenda it was at the behest of a much more autonomous state and a strong governing party that recognized an advantageous structure of competition consisting of a supermajority held by the MVR, a relatively fresh presidential mandate from the 2006 election, and a victory in
the constitutional referendum in February 2009. Institutionally and in the court of public opinion, it was time for the government to act.

The bill that was eventually brought to the legislature in August 2009 was based upon an existing proposal written by former Minister of Education Aristóbulo Istúriz some years prior. Istúriz, a former local leader of the United Teachers’ Union, a former representative for the Venezuelan Teachers’ Federation, and a veteran leftist candidate in municipal politics (winning the mayoralty of the Libertador municipality of Caracas in 1992), became Minister in 2002. In 2005 he prepared a draft of a new bill that clarified the direction of future reform but that did not have any institutional clout outside of the ministry. Although the government certainly had the institutional autonomy and capacity to pass such a law at that point in time, to do so carried short- and medium-term political risks. Legislative elections were scheduled for December 2005, and Chávez was up for re-election a year later. To introduce new legislation at this time of uncertainty may have reinvigorated the opposition prior to a period of electoral contestation — however weak that opposition ultimately proved to be — and was better left until after the government was able to secure new mandates once more. Bolivarian reformers chose not to act.

When the 2009 Organic Education Law was finally revived as a priority Aristóbulo Istúriz was long gone, replaced first by Hugo Chávez’s elder brother, Adán, in January 2007, and then by ministerial veteran Héctor Navarro in April 2008. This rapid turnover — three ministers in four years — may be taken as an early indicator of declining organizational cohesion, but the potentially negative effect of this instability was mediated by the personal profiles of each minister. Both Istúriz and Navarro were clearly deeply committed to Chávez, to the Bolivarian

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97 Javier Corrales notes that Venezuelan Ministers of Education lasted an average of 2.5 years between 1969 and 2000, although turnover increased in the 1980s and 1990s (five in six years). See Grindle (2004, pp. 38 and 194). Between 1999 and 2006 alone, there were 153 total cabinet changes (Corrales, 2011, p. 74), by far the highest of any presidential administration since democratization.
process more generally, and to comprehensive education reform. What experience Adán Chávez lacked in educational politics he made up for in ideological fervency; biographers of the president often credit him with introducing his younger brother to Marxism, and the New York Times described him as “left of the president” (Romero, 2007). This personnel profile within the Education Ministry — and its reinforcement by Luis Acuña as Higher Education minister (see Chapter 3) — ensured that the state had a reservoir of expertise, dedication, and ability that contributed to its organizational cohesion and reinforced the president’s decision to press forward with a new attempt at educational reform.

The autonomy that enabled Bolivarian reformers to put the Organic Law back on the agenda also allowed the Chávez administration to direct the design process as it saw fit. Using Istúriz’s 2005 proposal as a blueprint, the Ministries of Education and University Education were able to develop a comprehensive first draft of the bill, bring it to the public, and put it in the hands of the legislature in a fairly rapid fashion. Whereas in 2001 discussion between the Assembly’s Education Committee and civil society groups resulted in a collaborative bill, in 2009 friction between the government and opposition precluded such cooperation. Public consultation with the education sector began in March 2009 when the National Assembly held a forum about the country’s educational system and the prospect of implementing a new law. Two months later, the ministry invited 500 teachers, professors, and members of sympathetic civil society organizations to a “political retreat” in Miranda state in order to discuss a draft circulated by the Ministry of Education. In July the ministry also solicited feedback from the Andrés Bello Catholic University and the Central University of Venezuela, as well as from long-time opposition organizations such as the Venezuelan Association of Catholic Education, the Chamber of Private Education (which declined to participate in any discussion of this “socialist

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98 This is not to say he was uneducated; Chávez’s brother graduated from the University of the Andes.
law”), the National Association of Private Educational Institutions, as well as the Andrés Bello Catholic University and the Central University of Venezuela (Bravo Jáuregui and Uzcátegui, 2009, p. 242). While these invitations make clear that the government did not completely opt to bypass any social forces it thought might be oppositional, the extent to which reformers actually incorporated critical feedback appears to be fairly limited.

This ideational uniformity is further evidenced in the text of the bill itself, which many of the above groups deemed profoundly anathema to private and religious education (in the case of the Catholic organizations) and university autonomy (in the case of the autonomous universities). The new draft of the Organic Education Law differed remarkably from the 2001 version. It extolled the major referents of the Bolivarian vision by defining education as necessarily participatory and democratic, and having a mandate to facilitate Latin American and Caribbean integration as much as it should sovereignty, peace, social justice, gender equality and sustainable development (Art. 3). The concept of the Teaching State, absent in the 1980 Organic Law but certainly not novel in a longer view of Venezuelan history (see Chapter 2), was formally reintroduced as “the highest expression of the state in education” (Art. 5) whose task it was to guarantee cooperation, solidarity, and equality of opportunity in public and private institutions alike. The Teaching State, schools, communities and families were all defined as “co-responsible” for education (Art. 17), with organizations of Popular Power given the responsibility of having a “liberating pedagogical role” in local communities (Art. 18). Although the document did not contain any mention of the twenty-first century socialism it had been promoting since 2006, the state was clearly positioned to rise once more as the pre-eminent actor in the Venezuelan education system.
These general provisions were quite different from the contents of the 1980 Organic Law, but in the context of higher education reform the most significant point of departure concerned the definition of university community and the principle of university autonomy. Article 20.1 of the 2009 bill defined the educational community as “fathers, mothers, guardians, students, teachers, administrative employees, and workers,” with mention also made of citizens and representatives from community organizations. A modified definition was extended to higher education in Article 34.3, when members of the university community were listed as professors, students, administrative personnel, labourers, and alumni. This differed from the 1980 law, which did not list administrative employees and workers as members of any educational community, and from the 1970 Universities Law and 1999 Constitution, which limited it to professors, students, and alumni.

These new boundaries of community membership had direct implications for university governance. Critics within those universities viewed the mandated inclusion of administrative personnel and labourers as a violation of the administrative autonomy to “elect and name authorities and designate teaching, research, and administrative personnel” (1970 Universities Law, Art. 9.3). In fact, the distinctions between the four dimensions of autonomy specified in that law (organizational, administrative, academic and financial) were abolished altogether in the 2009 version. Although the Organic Law emphasized the primacy of autonomy, it would be granted by the state only when certain exogenously defined preconditions — the formal enfranchisement of workers and administrative employees — were sufficiently met. If workers and administrative employees were not incorporated into the university community, the state could revoke the university’s formal autonomy.
As important as this shift in the definition of university community was, the new law had an even more significant implication for state-university relations. The issue was not simply that the state expanded the boundaries of membership, but that administrative employees and workers also became constituents. Article 34.3 read that universities had the right to “elect and name their authorities on the basis of participatory and protagonist democracy, a revocable mandate, and in full equality of conditions that guarantee political rights to members of the university community: professors, students, administrative personnel, workers, and alumni.” In this expanded vision of cogobierno, administrative employees and labourers would have the same right to participate in university affairs as any other group, effectively transitioning from denizens into rights-bearing, voting members of autonomous university communities.

This proposed rearrangement of power revived the debate about voting parity that originated in the Venezuelan political context of the Renovation Movement in the 1960s and regionally in the Córdoba Movement before it (see Chapter 2). Advocates of the “uno por uno” approach, wherein each vote would be cast and weighted equally regardless of the title or position of the person who cast it, sought to overturn the traditional structure of electoral representation which, depending on the university, typically weighted the votes of professors between 20 and 40 times more than those of students. At the University of the Andes, for example, professors’ votes were weighted at 74 percent, students 25 percent, and alumni one percent in elections for executive authorities (Ramírez, 2011, p. 5; see Table 4.1). With the new law, professors stood to lose their majority in electoral affairs, while workers, administrative employees, and especially students and graduates stood to gain. Non-academic members of the university community, in other words, would have much more power within in an institution whose very core was based on an

99 See Chapter 2.
academic mission, although the precise nature of this gain would still need to be established through a *reglamento*.\(^{100}\)

Table 4.1. Composition of the University of the Andes Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>% of total university community</th>
<th>Proposed 2008 electoral structure</th>
<th>Proposed <em>uno por uno</em> system</th>
<th>Parity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>4,334</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative employees</td>
<td>4,013</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>2,264</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>51,104</td>
<td>39.12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni (1990-2008)</td>
<td>68,931</td>
<td>52.76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130,646</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Ramírez (2007).

There is one final element of the proposed electoral changes embedded within the Organic Law that had significant bearing on the autonomous universities. By turning participation in university elections from an academic right held by members of the university community (as defined by those universities) into a political right, these elections would become subject to national judicial review and therefore, as quickly proved to be the case, state enforcement. By assuming power over how university elections were conducted, the state gave itself the power to intervene in formally autonomous institutions if and when it could argue that the political or democratic rights of Venezuelan citizens were being violated. This narrowed scope of electoral self-determination raised the possibility that the very foundations of university governance could change to a degree not seen since Simón Bolívar first introduced university autonomy in the nineteenth century.

\(^{100}\) Organic laws, which determine the framework for an entire issue arena but usually lack the detail required to effectively implement them - require *reglamentos*, the “explicit rules governing implementation and that assign responsibilities for funding and implementing the law” (Rakowski and Espina, 2011, p. 159). In this case, because the total implementation of the law required internal organizational changes to the autonomous universities, those universities would themselves have to draft new *reglamentos* relating to their internal electoral procedures.
The Introduction and Adoption Process

The 2009 Organic Education Law’s new stipulations about membership and structures of representation within autonomous universities were odious to many professors and students within the public higher education system, and when the government made the draft bill available, in July 2009, members of these constituencies made their opposition known. While considerable autonomy allowed the state to evade challengers during the agenda-setting and design stages of reform, it could not simply ignore the protests generated by the introduction of the bill. A core group of Venezuelan universities summoned enough organizational capacity to enter the policymaking fray as political actors, constituting a bloc I refer to here as the oppositional university sector. (This bloc was countered by another group of universities I refer to as the pro-government universities, largely composed of experimental institutions whose authorities were handpicked by the Minister of University Education, as seen in Table 4.2).101

Table 4.2. Oppositional and Pro-Government Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opposition Universities</th>
<th>Pro-Government Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>Bolivarian University, Simón Rodriguez University, University of the Armed Forces, Ezequiel Zamora University, Bolivarian Workers' University, Federico Brito Figueroa University, Yaracuy University, Southern Sport University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Central University of Venezuela, University of the Andes, Zulia University, Eastern University, Carabobo University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Andrés Bello Catholic University, Metropolitan University, Santa Maria University, Santa Rosa University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The oppositional universities made use of existing or new intrauniversity and interuniversity connective structures that bound them together in protest, and formed additional alliances with

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101 This terminology obscures the political pluralism within universities, which I attempt to highlight when necessary and appropriate, but is convenient shorthand to identify the most politically active institutions that challenged and supported the state’s efforts at reform.
opposition parties and civil society groups (described in greater detail below). This groundswell of opposition began as the bill made its way through the legislative and executive branches, but clashing student and professorial preferences about university elections at the autonomous universities ensured that the protests were not sustained after the formal adoption of the law. The state’s capacity to withstand these challenges until they petered out was determined by significant organizational cohesion and the favourable political opportunity structure created by the MVR’s supermajority. The combination of the cleavages within the university sector, mobilized though it was, and the strength of the executive branch, facilitated the successful approval of the law.

When the Organic Law moved from being a concern of the Ministries to one of the legislative branch, it lost its insulation from oppositional social forces and became subject to public critique. Institutionally, legislative cohesion was produced by the increasing concentration of power in the president and the governing party, both of which demanded adherence from deputies (McCoy and Diez, 2011, p. 226). The opposition parties’ decision to boycott the 2005 elections ensured that the National Assembly was dominated by legislators from the MVR (116 seats) and smaller parties that, at least at that particular moment in 2005, were pro-Bolivarian: Podemos (18 seats), Patria Para Todos (10 seats) and the Partido Comunista de Venezuela (seven seats). This supermajority (151 of 167 seats) alone invested the state with both the institutional autonomy and capacity to pass the legislation, although this does not mean it was entirely homogenous. As discussed below, a small minority of legislators broke from Chávez after the 2007 constitutional referendum and spoke out against the Organic Law, brokering important connections with the oppositional universities.

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102 See Table 4.4.
In addition to these institutional factors, by 2009 the interpretive framework advanced by government and state elites prioritized intensive statist reform much more than in 2001, when the first Organic Education Law was addressed in the National Assembly. In 2001, Chávez’s rhetoric (and that of executive elites, such as those within the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport) focused primarily on party elites and the domestic opposition, generally discussing them in vague populist terms. After the 2002 coup attempt and oil strike, however, he began to advance what Hawkins describes as a conspiracy theory about American imperialism, frequently citing deliberate attempts of the Bush administration to destabilize Venezuela (Hawkins, 2010, p. 63). Eastwood (2011) notes that since 2005, when Chávez began to speak of twenty-first century socialism, "official discourse has increasingly used a partially distinct frame for conceptualizing class relations, one embedded in the broader frame of socialist revolutionism" (p. 3). The intensification of populist discourse, with its emphasis on nationalist rhetoric, popular sovereignty, polarizing characterizations of supporters and opponents, and the fearlessness of a charismatic leader, helped frame the new Organic Education Law within the broader political context.

The increasing recourse to populist rhetoric, combined with the ongoing universalization reforms that began in 2003, meant that by 2009 a ‘university transformation’ frame was easily applied to this attempt at legislative reform. State elites presented the traditional definition of university autonomy as an attempt of the authorities within the autonomous universities to “hide” from accountability and to evade adapting to the needs of the nation. Adopting the

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103 Here, I draw from Hawkins, Rosas, and Johnson (2011) in understanding populism not as a form of patronage-based distributive strategy, as in Chapter 3, but as "a weak kind of ideology that posits a Manichaean conflict between a unified will of the people (seen as the embodiment of the side of Good) and a conspiring elite that has subverted this will" (p. 189).
104 Eastwood (2011) makes the important point that it is not clear how much of this discursive shift was deliberate, and that it was "possible that the change is less intentional and strategic and more a consequence of shifting influences within the inner circle of the Chávez government, or a consequence of the unfolding path of radicalization" (p. 4).
“revolutionary rhetoric [that framed] the government’s increasingly grand socioeconomic reforms such as the Missions” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 63), the reformers situated the new Organic Education Law within the larger project of political and institutional transformation. Although the university transformation frame only applied to those portions of the law regarding higher education, it nevertheless disciplined legislators by reminding them of the MVR’s priorities and reinforced the entire reform process as one that separated its supporters (the revolutionaries, the poor, el pueblo) from its detractors (the elites, the rich, los escuálidos). This interpretive framework was therefore just as much about promoting the bill to the Venezuelan public as it was about promoting ideational and organizational cohesion within the MVR.

The state’s university transformation frame applied only to the segment of the Organic Law concerned with universities (and therefore cannot explain, for example, how or why opponents of the reforms to primary or secondary education mobilized), but it still contributed more to organizational cohesion than the university sector’s mobilization of its own interpretive or symbolic resources. The oppositional universities struggled to advance a compelling counter-frame in the weeks leading up to the bill’s introduction in the Assembly. Activists drew some inspiration from the 2007 national protests over the constitutional referendum and closure of RCTV, emphasizing broad values-based concerns such as freedom and democracy, but they did not develop a compelling interpretive framework that resonated with all of the university community. The principle of autonomy remained just that: a principle rather than a mobilizing frame capable of stirring people to act.

Two factors help explain this ineffective mobilization of symbolic resources. First, the authorities and professors often referred to autonomy in ways that failed to generate sympathy or solidarity with other groups. They either approached the issue in a technical manner,
complaining that the law unjustly violated organizational and administrative autonomy, or emphasized the university’s meritocratic and hierarchical character in a way that painted opponents as vulgar philistines intent on destroying the academic character of the university.

Two conversations I conducted during fieldwork illustrate this position well. First, a former rector from one of the oppositional universities explained that

*It is not logical from the point of view of the universities that in order to pass a PhD for example, if you have to vote for a PhD degree, that you have to involve the opinion of the workers or the opinion of the administrative personnel. To me it’s very logical that if you’re going to talk about social security, about insurance, about salaries and so forth, well, you have to look at the opinion of everybody, to solve those questions. Those are very important questions for the administration of the university. But in academic matters, who should have a doctorate degree and who should not, whether this thesis is good enough for a doctoral degree or is not good enough, you cannot submit that to a popular vote. It has nothing to do with the opinion of the majority. It has to do with technical matters. For example, if you’re going to operate in an operating room, you’re going to operate on the heart of a patient, you cannot submit how to operate to a vote! It has nothing to do with democracy. So the definition of democracy has to be sufficiently precise [with respect to] where does it apply and where does it not. And it doesn't apply to many academic matters. Academic matters should be resolved with the proper academic procedures. And those academic procedures in many instances have nothing to do with a vote in an assembly or even in a council. It has to do with the opinion of experts, with the opinion of peers (Interview 3, 2012).*

Here, the rector allowed that decisions about administrative issues such as salaries and benefits should involve all affected members of the university community, but raised the spectre of workers and administrative employees gaining voting privileges in academic affairs. A former dean at the Central University similarly rejected the notion that non-academic personnel should have voting rights by invoking the medical profession, saying that “if you are going to have surgery, you don’t ask the person who cleans the place what kind of surgery you are going to have" (Interview 4, 2012). This dean also compared the university meritocracy to the military on the grounds that “we always have said that those people who are in an army do not elect the
general. And that's right! Because that's not the way, it's not because you are popular that you are the general in a battle” (Interview 4, 2012).

In raising the possibility that soon janitors would sit in on doctoral defences and that secretaries would influence curriculum development, these professors and university authorities echoed the ire of Coriolanus at the prospect of giving plebeians authority over the patricians, of debasing the Roman senate by allowing “the crows to peck the eagles” (Shakespeare, 2000 [1605], 3.1.139). The expansion of the university electorate, they feared, would turn the selection of university authorities into a glorified popularity contest rather than a merit-based competition. These professors defended a stylized view of the university as a rule-governed community of scholars (Olsen, 2007; see Table 1.1 in Chapter 1), but failed to help generate the concern needed to successfully create a furor in response to the law. The distinctions between different dimensions of autonomy were legitimate but not emotionally evocative, an important deficit in a context of significant discursive populism. Additionally, defensive statements about ensuring the exclusion of workers and administrative employees only perpetuated the government’s narrative that the autonomous universities were some of the last enclaves of privileges associated with the Punto Fijo system, and alienated individuals who, regardless of

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105 Thanks to Joel Rodgers for bringing my attention to this work.
106 It is perhaps noteworthy that student proponents of electoral parity within the autonomous universities were less inclined to articulate any fear of workers and administrative employees passing judgment on their scholarship or on the quality of their education in general. Moreover, claims that workers and administrative employees would soon have significant power in academic affairs were mathematically disingenuous. The Central University had a similar membership profile as the University of the Andes, as illustrated in Table 4.1. The Central University has approximately 300,000 alumni, 60,000 students, 8,000 professors (active and retired), 4,000 administrative employees, and 2,000 workers (Consejo Universitario, 2012). Even if every single one of these workers wanted nothing more than to radically transform the university according to the tenets of twenty-first century socialism, the distribution of electoral power would not allow it. Nobody with whom I spoke expressed similar fears about alumni mobilizing to stage some sort of coup against the university, and while several professors did indicate that they did not think students’ votes should have the same weight as their own, they did not seem to find the prospect of students mobilizing as a bloc too troubling (although had students favoured the government en masse, these professors might have had a different opinion). While it is true that university workers have no compunction about engaging in various forms of direct action that may inconvenience academic staff, as they did in the incident described in the Introduction, to characterize them as uniformly ready to tear down the ivory tower is simply to scapegoat them.
political affiliation, saw those in the academic profession as part of an elite intent on keeping its social and cultural status.

The emphasis on the technical infringements on autonomy, and especially the references to the right of the university to be exclusionary, are linked to a second reason why the oppositional university community was unable to construct a compelling frame that would boost organizational cohesion: a cleavage between professors and students. Achieving voting parity was desirable for students in the autonomous universities, something that would benefit them by giving them more internal governing power relative to the professors than at any other point in Venezuelan history. Chávez was, in a sense, finally creating an institutional basis for some of the proposals advanced during the Renovation Movement 40 years earlier. While many students agreed with professors and authorities that the Organic Law was not moving through proper procedural channels and that it would lead to violations of autonomy if implemented, this was not enough to get them to mobilize against their electoral interests. Without a united interpretive frame to bridge these differences, at least in part if not in whole, the student movement and the professoriate remained at symbolic odds.

These competing preferences between professors and students extended into the organization of the university community's opposition to the Organic Education Law. The organizational cohesion of the oppositional university sector was largely determined by three types of linkages that already existed or that were created over the course of the contentious episodes. The first were intrainstitutional linkages, consisting primarily of University Councils that connected different parts of the university hierarchy, as well as bodies that united adjacent organizations such as student and faculty unions. Second, interinstitutional connective structures united groups from different universities. These connections primarily took the form of representative bodies
like the National Universities Council, rectors’ associations, and faculty and student federations. The last type of linkage existed between university and non-university actors including the media and, more substantially, the political opposition. In all cases, the connections proved to be initially difficult to politicize, produced primarily institutional rather than non-institutional responses, and were quick to weaken after President Chávez signed the Organic Law.

*Intrauniversity Mobilization*

The executive positions within Venezuela’s autonomous universities (rectors, academic and administrative vice-rectors, and secretaries) are typically held by experienced professors elected by members of the university community. By law, these individuals must be Venezuelan nationals, have strong moral values, possess the title of doctor, and have held research or teaching posts at that university for a minimum of five years ( Universities Law, 1970, Art. 28). In 2009, the authorities at all five formally autonomous institutions had considerable experience in matters of university governance and, in some cases, national educational policymaking. Each rector had previously held lower governance positions (deans, vice-rectors, secretaries) prior to being elected as the top leader of their respective institutions, and the secondary executive authorities were variously members of University Councils, faculty governing boards, or otherwise involved in the internal political affairs of the institutions. Some authorities also had previous experience working for the past governments. For example, Francesco Leone, the rector of Lisandro Alvarado Experimental University, participated in drafting several national laws and bylaws during the 1990s (Leone, no date).

None of these university authorities, however, had extensive experience engaging with the Chávez government on an explicitly political level prior to the introduction of the 2009 Organic Education Law. To be sure, they all interacted with the state frequently, a necessary consequence
of the fact that autonomous universities are publicly funded institutions. Yet these interactions regarded budgetary and other technical matters, not conflict over the very essence of the state-university relationship. Even those authorities that had experience in designing legislation, such as Rector Leone, were presented with a new political context; whatever historical repertoires they might have been able to draw upon during puntofijismo needed to be modified in order to adapt to the new political context of chavismo and twenty-first century socialism. However much expertise the authorities had in the context of university governance, they had neither sufficient political experience in the ways required of them to effectively navigate disagreements about the Organic Education Law, nor the backing of the traditional (pre-1999) political parties that they could once count on for support.

The executive authorities’ lack of national political experience influenced how they led University Councils, the highest governing body in all autonomous universities, into the political fray. Ordinarily existing to give formal and regular representation to all parts of the university community, the presiding rectors shepherded these bodies into a new political role. As soon as a draft of the Organic Law was publicized in the first week of July 2009, the University Councils at each of the five formally autonomous universities immediately mobilized at the behest of their executive authorities even though the academic year had ended and the councils were not scheduled to hold any meetings. In this period prior to the approval of the law, the councils functioned as mechanisms to encourage discussion and debate about the law. Rectors Cecilia García Arocha (Central University) and Mario Bonucci (University of the Andes) called the bodies into permanent session, which enabled them to convocate additional meetings at short notice, while the councils at the University of Zulia and the Eastern University expressed their respective condemnation and concern about the bill. As the most authoritative, visible, and
representative governing bodies of the universities, the councils' swift rejection of the law formally positioned the institutions as squarely against the initiative.

This characterization of University Councils as oppositional does not mean that they were homogeneously so. The Ministry of Higher Education had one representative on each of these councils, ensuring that state interests had at least some expression. In the case of the Central University there was also an elected faculty representative who joined Baldo Alesi, the Ministry representative and former dean of Law and Political Science. Miguel Alfonso, a professor of medicine and specialist in HIV/AIDS epidemiology, was a committed supporter of President Chávez and the Bolivarian project, and was frequently at odds with the rest of the University Council even prior to this legislation. Thus, on August 10, 2009, when the University Council released a statement that “categorically rejected” the bill as undemocratic and unconstitutional, Alfonso went on record as saying that he excepted his vote from the matter because the statement reflected “a biased political position that does not recognize or account for the progress made in matters of education” and that “there are parts of the statement that aim to confuse the Venezuelan population” (Consejo Universitario, 2009). This was an important point of dissent, and cautions against a view of predominantly oppositional representative bodies as wholly and exclusively so.

Interuniversity Mobilization

The University Councils provided an important institutional connection between the authorities, professors, students and alumni that composed each university community (at least as traditionally defined), but each of these groups also made use of existing interinstitutional associations specific to their professional or academic stations. University authorities turned to a previously existing but largely demobilized organization called the Venezuelan Association of
University Rectors (AVERU). AVERU was formed in the 1980s to give past and present rectors at autonomous, experimental and private universities an independent forum, but until approximately 2005 it was a largely ineffectual organization with little power, “a type of academic club with no social impact” (Albornoz, 2006, p. 4). When Decree 3444 truncated the power of the National Universities Council in 2005, however, AVERU became a viable vehicle for dissent. Combined with an organizational split in the same year that saw the rectors of pro-government experimental universities renounce their membership in favour of joining a new rectors’ organization called the Association of Bolivarian Rectors (ARBOL), the events of 2005 brought renewed purpose and more ideological uniformity that strengthened its capacity to step into the national political arena.

AVERU’s mobilization was important, but in this nascent political form it struggled to coordinate a strong response to the proposed legislation prior to its approval by National Assembly and President Chávez. It was only after the president signed the law that the organization identified concrete actions it planned to undertake, including the creation of three working groups to continue the analysis of and opposition to the law: one concerned with formulating a judicial response (coordinated by Central University Rector Cecilia García Arocha), one concerned with consulting non-governmental organizations, political organizations and other civil society groups about the possibility of holding a referendum about the law’s constitutionality, and one dedicated to coordinating action alongside the student sector (Universidad de Los Andes, 2009). This post hoc response reiterated AVERU’s displeasure with the legislation, but did not make a difference in its legally binding status.

107 As discussed in Chapter 3, Decree 3444 transferred a number of powers formerly associated with the National Universities Council, such as the right to create new universities, to the Ministry of University Education.
Unlike Venezuelan rectors, students and faculty had a long history of organized collective action both intra- and interinstitutionally. Their unions, already seasoned in the processes of articulating, making, and defending claims on behalf of their members, entered into familiar protest territory. Representative activities included the creation of a new Permanent Council for the Defence of Democratic Education formed by the presidents of the Central University student union and faculty association just four days before the bill was passed, a series of events to discuss the bill at the University of the Andes, and a panel called “Democratization or Ideologization?” at the Eastern University. These intrauniversity unions, however, had much greater impact when united in their respective interinstitutional federations. The University Teachers’ Federation of Venezuela (FAPUV), a well institutionalized organization representing 40,000 of the country’s professors, had already been wrestling with the Chávez government (and many governments before it) over the establishment of national salary standards (Stefany, 2013). FAPUV denounced the Organic Law as “an instrument for the consolidation of the Chávez revolution” (APUFAT, 2009), yet another grievance held by an already mobilized sector steeled against what it considered to be an antagonistic government.

As FAPUV did with faculty, the Federation of Student Centres (FCU) brought together student unions from all of the autonomous universities, as well as from several experimental institutions. Historically the FCU had been organizationally weaker than FAPUV, a consequence

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108 This number includes retired faculty. Upon retirement, professors are able to access pensions that provide them with full salary and benefits. Though no longer formally teaching or researching, these individuals remain active in institutional associations and federations in part to protect these benefits.

109 Historically FAPUV has challenged university leadership as much as it has the government. In this particular context, it allied with the university leadership rather than with the government, but this should not be taken as indicative of a generalizable dynamic. It is also worth noting that after democratization Venezuelan teachers’ unions were deeply embedded in the corporatist structure of Punto Fijo democracy, which is to say that they did not have much autonomy, and that the federated organization of this sector meant that the labour power of Venezuelan educators was weaker than in other Latin American countries (Grindle, 2004, p. 134).
of high turnover in both leadership and membership,\textsuperscript{110} but was also more spontaneous and willing to engage in non-institutional forms of protest. However, in 2009 the capacity of the FCU to engage in such resistance was undermined by organizational deficits that lingered from the 2007 student protests surrounding the RCTV closure and constitutional referendum. Although the student presence in those protests significantly contributed to the failed constitutional reform, three key organizational legacies from the 2007 student movement negatively impacted its remobilization in 2009.

First, there was a “lack of communication and [weak] internal mechanisms among opposition students in different regions of the country” (Brading, 2013, p. 131) during 2007. The protests in Caracas were not coordinated with students in San Cristobal (Táchira state), Mérida, or other university cities across the country. This reflected a pattern of organizational, not just geographic, distance between student activists. Second, many of the most prominent leaders and rank and file activists in 2007 came from the private universities, especially the Andrés Bello Catholic University in Caracas. The active participation of the private university sector facilitated important interinstitutional connections with public universities, but it also meant that a substantial portion of student organizing occurred outside of the scope of the Federation of Student Centres, an infrastructure unique to the public universities. In 2009, therefore, even though students from the autonomous universities were far more involved in protest activities than students from private institutions than in 2007, they could not access much recent institutional memory in which the FCU was a focal point of organization. The FCU was more important in 2009 than it was in 2007, but it was not yet an efficient and organized vehicle for action.

\textsuperscript{110} FCU presidents are supposed to be elected for a two-year period, while matriculation and convocation circumscribe membership in the student body.
The general weakness of the FCU is directly related to the third organizational legacy of the 2007 protests: the issue of student leadership. The 2007 protests were very much driven by high profile Caracas-based student activists dubbed the Generation of 2007 (a play on the famous Generation of 1928 that challenged dictator Juan Vicente Gómez). Brading argues that the focus on these leaders at the expense of the larger movement prevented organizational durability because a particularly large leadership vacuum emerged in their wake when they graduated and moved on to pursue postgraduate degrees, positions in private industry, or began the process of launching their own municipal, state and federal political careers. With these formidable leaders no longer participating in student politics, “there were no possibilities to shift the movement beyond the phase of the constitutional referendum and its rejection of the RCTV closure” (Brading, 2013, p. 131). One former student activist from the Andrés Bello Catholic University put it to me bluntly when he said that

The leadership [of the student movement] became too big. The leaders became too egotistical. They became disconnected from the students and there wasn't the same rally that there was in 2007. And then with the governors' election and the mayors' election [in 2008], the [student] leadership came forward [to run]. Many of the student representatives started to become actual government leaders, they became involved in the government. And they actually won the popular vote. Some of them were elected, but for local government, to be mayors, and then the next generation of leadership weren't prepared enough to take the student movement so the masses of students lost their hope in their leaders (Armás, personal interview, 2012).

While all student movements suffer to some degree from the perils of participant turnover, in this case it was compounded by the poorly institutionalized character of the FCU discussed above. The student movement in 2009 was fundamentally undermined by the combined weaknesses of personality-driven organization and the low level of institutionalization of the Federation of Student Centres. Expressed in Huntington's (1968, p. 55) terms, the ratio of political participation
to political institutionalization was such that the former exceeded the latter, rendering the historically important student organization relatively ineffective.

The tepid response of the student movement in 2009 cannot be blamed entirely on the legacies of 2007. Additional organizational deficits unique to 2009 undermined student organizing during this period. As already noted, students were divided amongst themselves about the potential effect of the proposed Organic Law on their own interests. Many students at the autonomous universities objected to the manner in which the law was being presented by the government but knew they stood to directly and immediately benefit from it. Students at the private and experimental universities, on the other hand, were not particularly concerned with the issue of parity either way; although some students from experimental institutions with de facto autonomy actively protested the bill, the issue was of little relevance for students at the majority of institutions where authorities were still chosen by the Ministry of University Education (experimental universities) or by parochial governing boards (private universities).

Additionally, of course, there is the basic issue of profound political division within the Venezuelan student body about the Chávez government itself. Chávez maintained some support within the autonomous universities, institutions that, it is important to remember, were traditionally some of the most progressive or radical institutions in Venezuelan society. By 2009 Venezuelan students had effectively branched off into two camps: the traditional student movement officially represented by the Federation of University Centres, and what is sometimes called the Bolivarian student movement, comprised of pro-Chávez students. These two flanks often clashed with each other, sometimes violently, but the Bolivarian student movement did not have nearly as much organizational capacity or autonomy from the state as the traditional student movement. This does not mean that the Bolivarian student movement was simply an extension of
the state; radical socialist groups that supported Chávez often operated autonomously from the
government, including the prominent M-28 revolutionary student group Movement (Ciccariello-
Maher, 2013). While pro-Chávez students who publicly supported the Organic Law held the
FCU at the Eastern University, in general the Bolivarian student movement could not compete
organizationally with the traditional student movement. It also, in a very basic sense, lacked the
incentive to become more active; the Bolivarian movement already had political and state power,
so there was no real need to devote considerable effort to student mobilization.

The division between the two student sectors marked an important historical shift in the
dynamics of Venezuelan student activism. While student movements in years past had fraught
relations with the state, those students were operating from a position of left wing radicalism:
they were the communists, the socialists, the revolutionaries. In the Chávez era, government and
state elites assumed the official leftist position, using the levers of political power to push
forward with explicitly socialist legislation in the name of the Bolivarian Revolution. Students
from the autonomous and private universities therefore remained structurally opposed to state
power, but the terms of this opposition shifted: they rejected the official means and end of
socialist transformation as conceived by chavismo. One former student activist and member of
Primero Justicia mused that “this government is the status quo for our generation. We grew up
seeing Chávez and we rebel against the government. It’s natural. The student movement used to
be communists and now they're closer to the capitalist system than they are communist. And
that's really weird for a student movement in Latin America” (Armás, personal interview,

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111 See Martinez et al. (2010) for lengthy interviews with members of the Bolivarian student movement.
For this activist, and for many others, Venezuela’s turn to the Left upended the traditional reference points for student activism.

The ideological realignment of the student movement does not mean that all of the anti-Chávez student protestors were ‘right wing.’ A number of anti-Chávez student activists I encountered during fieldwork, including two consecutive leaders of the FCU at the Central University, described themselves as socialists or even communists, even as they challenged the Bolivarian government. Many believed that workers are part of the university and should have some right to representation, and even more interestingly, that the authorities of the autonomous universities are closed to discussion and disinterested in inclusivity. This sentiment was echoed especially with regard to the Central University, including by former and current students at other institutions, and highlights the internal political diversity within the university community even as members mobilized against the government. Nevertheless, the government and pro-Bolivarian activists often grouped these leaders in with students from private universities (especially the Andrés Bello Catholic University and the Metropolitan University) who were more avowedly liberal and anti-socialist, and who were often described by advocates of reform as part of the radical right. Moreover, the ideological shift was not one of dealignment, for the long-time emphasis on democracy remained a central focus of the oppositional students. The realignment was therefore more about the ideological dressing of the state-university conflict.

In some ways, this is a similar dynamic to the political socialization of Polish students during mid-century communism: “what is striking […] was not that students were anti-socialist or anti-capitalist, but that they entered confrontation politically unformed. Thus the story of students in 1968 is a story not only of how the Polish regime permanently alienated many left-leaning intellectuals, but also of how it also disillusioned many more who had a basic yet amorphous sympathy for the goals of the government” (Connelly, 2005, p. 207).

One feature of the extraordinary polarization in Venezuela is how easily opponents paint each other as ‘extreme’ or ‘radical.’ While a larger discussion of what is ‘left’ and ‘right’ in Chávez’s Venezuela is beyond the scope of this project, the ideological realignment of Venezuela’s student movement did not go unnoticed by other regional student organizations. For example, the Student Federation at the University of Chile condemned Venezuelan students’ role in the 2014 protests against president Nicolás Maduro, stating that “we don’t feel represented by the actions of Venezuelan student sectors that have taken the side of the defence of the old order and are opposed to the path that the people have defined” (Coker, 2014, p. 96).
than the long-time tradition of students challenging state power in and of itself. This antagonism remained structurally intact.

This diversity within the national student body politic, both in terms of its interests and its ideological orientation, meant that it was difficult to incite, let alone sustain, mobilization against the Organic Education Law. It also meant that students were not as willing or ready to ally with faculty and university authorities in service of coordinated mobilization. Beyond the University Councils at the autonomous universities and the informal interactions between various groups opposed to the law, resistance to the legislation was generally local or self-contained within particular constituencies (students, the professoriate) in individual universities. The autonomous universities were not yet behaving as united, internally cohesive institutions embroiled in a focused political challenge to the state.

Finally, there is of course the question of the participation of workers and administrative employees themselves, the very subjects whose incorporation into the university community was at the heart of the battle between the government and autonomous universities. Once more, consideration of these groups further reveals the complexity of the politics of university reform. While the workers were generally in favour of the 2009 law, the administrative staff was roughly split. It is difficult to determine the proportion of administrative employees that did support the legislation both because of a lack of publicly available data and due to variation within each university, but the administrative vice-rector at Simón Bolívar University\textsuperscript{114} told me that approximately 60 percent of administrative staff in that institution opposed the law, compared to the near total approval of workers (Colmenares, personal interview, 2012). Even if this estimation is considerably off the mark, it still points to significant division within one of the

\textsuperscript{114} Simón Bolívar University is an experimental university but has partial de facto autonomy: its rectors are elected by the university community.
groups that would become enfranchised by the law. Overall, it seems as though the administrative employees, many of whom directly answer to the executive authorities and interact with members of the universities’ commanding heights on a daily basis, opted not to advocate for their political enfranchisement. Those who supported the bill may have participated in other ways to support the legislation, but the National Association of University Technical and Administrative Professionals publicly opposed the law.

The division between workers and administrative staff persisted (and arguably deepened) after the Organic Law was passed. During the same protest at the Rectorate detailed in the opening vignette of the Introduction, I sat with a receptionist to one of the executive authorities as we waited for instruction about what to do. She expressed fear about being in this situation, saying that the workers were unpredictable and that they contained some of the most radical elements of chavismo. She was afraid, she said, of a repeat of an incident in March 2010 when a group of individuals — it is unclear who, but she associated them with the government — set fire to the Rectorate, causing significant property damage and destroying important university records (Bejarano, 2010). This secretary condemned the action, and expressed her strong disapproval of the workers’ repertoire of tactics that included not just holding people inside buildings, but also blocking off entrances to libraries, departments, and even the Central University hospital. The administrative staff generally already saw themselves as important members of the university community, perhaps not as enfranchised members, but certainly proud of their essential role in allowing the university to carry out its academic and social mandates. In contrast, they regarded the workers as uncouth radicals whose disruption of university affairs was unprofessional and unacceptable.
For their part, workers at autonomous and some experimental universities broadly supported the 2009 Organic Education Law, arguing that they deserved formal representation as non-academic members of the university community. However, the workers did not unambiguously support the government. Workers, too, were affected by the budgetary constraints addressed in Chapter 3, and many were unhappy with the Chávez government for reasons having to do with national salary standards. While organizations like the Federation of University Workers certainly supported the Organic Education Law because it gave them more electoral power, they did not yet have formal membership or any institutional representation in the university community, and their actions in support of the bill had very little effect on the political response of their respective universities.

The Mobilization of Non-University Forces

The rejection of the Organic Education Law by so many organizations from within the university sector sent a clear signal to the Chávez administration that the legislation did not have the support of some of the most important actors in the educational arena. The concerns of these members of the university community were then amplified by further interaction with other social forces. In addition to a variety of groups challenging the legislation’s impact on primary, secondary, and private education, non-educational sectors like the private media and opposition parties (especially Podemos) allied with different parts of the university opposition. Media organizations expressed reservations about how Article 9 of the Organic Law, which mandated that all media outlets had to assist educational development by producing content that aligned with the values and principles set out in the constitution, would affect freedom of speech and expression. Not only did such outlets provide broadcast and print platforms to the authorities, professors and students that opposed the law, but they also directly participated in protest
activities. Journalists and other figures from the private media sector attended some of the marches and demonstrations detailed below, and in one case formed an alliance between the Central University professors' association and media unions in the city of Guayana, a collaboration reminiscent of some of the connections built during the 2007 RCTV protests (Contreras, 2009).

In addition to cooperation with the media, the university sector was also joined by a number of municipal politicians, governors, and representatives from federal opposition parties. The national opposition parties roundly denounced the law but suffered from a self-inflicted inability to challenge the bill in the Assembly. The weakness of the party system, including pervasive internal party fragmentation in the main opposition parties, consistently undermined the opposition’s attempts to challenge Chávez throughout the duration of his time in power. Because most of the opposition parties boycotted the 2005 legislative election, they had almost no formal leverage in the National Assembly, eliminating what was arguably the singularly most important avenue of possible institutional recourse to the law. Podemos, a party identified with Chávez in 2005 but which broke with the government after the 2007 constitutional referendum, emerged as the main source of formal opposition within the National Assembly. With just 18 of 167 seats, however, the most deputies could do was to speak and vote against the law in a house otherwise dominated by members of the governing party. The formal party opposition, in other words, had no real power to block the adoption of the Organic Law in the Venezuelan parliament.

The opposition parties’ exclusion from the Assembly did not mean that they recused themselves from addressing the proposed law altogether. Outside of the legislature, Primero Justicia and Un Nuevo Tiempo — the new party of José Luis Fariás, who led the 2001 Organic Education Law initiative — vehemently came out against the law. While neither party held seats
in the Assembly and were therefore at an institutional disadvantage, they had considerable visibility and legitimacy in this episode of contention for two reasons. First, prominent subnational officeholders that belonged to and identified with national opposition parties agitated against the Organic Law. Henrique Capriles, a Primero Justicia member who was then the governor of Miranda state (and who later ran against Chávez in the 2012 presidential election), and Henrique Salas Feo, Proyecto Venezuela member and governor of Carabobo, both registered their objections in the national media. The mayors of Sucre and Los Salias, both of whom were also members of Primero Justicia, joined Antonio Ledezma, the metropolitan mayor of Caracas (formerly of Acción Democrática and later of Alianza Bravo Pueblo, a party he created in 2000) in similarly denouncing the legislation. As politicians without seats in the National Assembly, however, their protestations did not have any impact on the bill as it moved through the legislature.

Second, as briefly addressed above, Primero Justicia and Un Nuevo Tiempo absorbed key members of the 2007 student protests. Primero Justicia counted among its members many graduates from the Andrés Bello Catholic University, most notably Yon Goicoechea, a student leader involved in the 2007 protests who was awarded the Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty by the Cato Institute in 2008. Stalin Gonzalez and Ricardo Sanchez, activists from the Central University also involved in the 2007 protests, became active members of Un Nuevo Tiempo, with Gonzalez in particular brokering important relations between the student movement, using his dual authority as a prominent party member and former FCU president to rouse students against the law (Noticias24, 20 August 2009). This movement from student politics to national politics, a road well travelled by so many other Venezuelan politicians, is an
example of recursive political dynamism in that it gave the parties more legitimacy in the context of educational politics and augmented the platforms of the former student activists.

The Approval of the Organic Education Law

All of the organizational brokerage chronicled above culminated in various expressions of dissent between the initial circulation of the draft in June 2009 and its approval in the legislature two months later. Non-institutional forms of protest began shortly before the legislation was formally introduced, when Central University Vice-Rector Nicolás Bianco called for opponents to march from the College of Engineering to the National Assembly on August 11, 2009. This march did not stop the government, and the Assembly’s Education Commission introduced the proposal on August 13, when it was debated in a marathon ten-hour session that led several opposition deputies to walk out. During a break in the deputies’ discussion, Education Committee president María de Queipo reminded the public of the law's ideological and political stakes, describing opponents in a televised interview as “mercantilist” and “associated with coups and acts of destabilization” (*El País*, 15 August 2009). Upon reconvening that night, the remaining deputies approved the bill for the first time shortly after midnight on August 14, 2009.

Venezuelans took to the streets the next day, with students, professors, and university authorities joining a full range of oppositional civil society groups in confrontation with the National Guard and government supporters. On August 15, despite the fact that the bill had not been subject to a second reading in the Assembly (a point I attend to below), President Chávez signed it into law during a live radio and television address at the historic Teresa Carreño Theatre in the Bellas Artes district of Caracas. With Education Commission chair María de Quiepo, National Assembly president Cilia Flores, and education minister Héctor Navarro at his side, Chávez proclaimed that the law would facilitate liberation through education, and that it would
help the state eliminate “the chains of cultural colonialism and cultural backwardness” by leading to “profound transformation” and “the creation of a new man, a new woman, a socialist society” (ABC, 16 August 2009). Its approval marked the first and only major legislative victory for the Chávez government in the educational arena in a full decade in power.

In the weeks following the enactment of the 2009 Organic Education Law, the university sector tried to sustain mobilization against the new legislation. Sporadic marches called variously by members of the university community and the political opposition continued until approximately August 22. Students blockaded the Valle Coche highway in Caracas and a small group of students at the University of the Andes went on a brief hunger strike, while the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), a coalition of opposition parties, advocated civil disobedience and tried to collect enough signatures to force the government to hold a referendum about whether the law should be repealed. Antonio Ledezma, the Metropolitan Mayor of Caracas, begged Venezuelans to keep up the resistance. “The struggle has to start now,” he implored. “It’s not time to put our heads down, it’s time for dignity, and a dignified people don’t give up” (Informe21, 15 August 2009).

These protests notwithstanding, opponents proved unable to sustain the same dramatic resistance. As the new academic year began, public protest slowly petered out and university authorities retreated in search of institutional solutions. AVERU, the Venezuelan Association of University Rectors, began to plan its next steps, working with legal counsel at the Central University to strategize with professors and students about what to do next. FAPUV and its member professor associations submitted several constitutional challenges to the Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ), all of which languished unanswered. As weeks progressed into months, other, pre-existing issues regained saliency, most notably ongoing contention over
budgetary matters that directly affected universities’ operations. A new budgetary cycle was underway, and the Ministry of University Education announced in mid-October that it was going to grant only 35-45 percent of the funds requested by the autonomous universities, most of which those institutions had no choice but to spend on salaries. The resumption of conflict over salaries was of more immediate concern to professors than the potential implications of the Organic Law, and they, along with a rapidly demobilizing student sector, ceased public protest.

*Obstacles to Implementation*

While the state could claim victory over the adoption process of the Organic Education Law, its implementation in the university sector was a different matter. The university opposition declared the law illegitimate, arguing that its contents and the manner in which it was approved were unconstitutional. First, they argued, the bill did not receive the required two readings within the National Assembly. The government argued that the Assembly’s approval of the 2001 Organic Law counted as its first reading and that the vote to approve it in 2009 was simply the second reading of an amended draft. The opposition rejected this line of reasoning, responding that the design process and content of the 2009 bill was substantially different from the 2001 version and that the bills were presented in two different legislative sessions. Second, the universities argued that the text of the 2009 law contradicted the 1999 Constitution and the 1970 Universities Law. Both the 1970 Universities Law and the 1999 Constitution defined the “university community” as consisting of professors, students and graduates, making no mention of workers and administrative employees. The inclusion of these new categories in the Organic Law was therefore incommensurable with existing laws. Moreover, the universities argued that the 2009 law violated the spirit and substance of the institutionalized right of universities to make their own governance decisions free from state interference. By insisting that all university
communities must include non-academic constituencies, the government infringed upon the organizational and administrative autonomy guaranteed in Article 9 of the Universities Law and Article 109 of the constitution.

These objections formed the basis for the autonomous universities’ unwillingness to abide by the new parameters of the 2009 Organic Law. Put simply, the oppositional universities chose to use their autonomy to ignore the articles pertaining to higher education, particularly in organizational and administrative affairs. Those universities which held internal elections — all five autonomous universities and several experimental universities — refused to amend their electoral reglamentos in accordance with the new representative structure detailed in Article 34.3. Rather than adjusting their organizational structures and administrative practices to incorporate new members into the university community and create new electoral systems based on universal suffrage and voting parity, universities with formal or de facto administrative autonomy prepared to hold regularly scheduled elections to replace authorities whose terms were set to expire. In the process of preparing for these polls the universities’ electoral commissions indicated that they would adhere to the traditional bylaws rather than those set out in the new Organic Law. Benjamin Scharifker, formerly the rector at Simón Bolívar University and subsequently the rector of the private Metropolitan University in Caracas, said that “the Organic Education Law has been passed but it has not been successfully applied. It’s there, but it’s dead. In Spanish we say letra muerta: letters are dead, nobody really cares about them. Everything that has to do with universities in the Organic Education Law is dead letters” (Scharifker, personal interview, 2012a).

In response to this rebellion, justices from the Electoral Chamber of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ), at the behest of members of the university community itself, imposed what it
described as “precautionary measures” that prevented the universities from violating the Organic Education Law in the first place: the court indefinitely suspended elections within those universities unless and until authorities revised their electoral bylaws to ensure parity and the incorporation of workers and administrative personnel. The process that led to this sanction began in early May 2011, when a group of students, workers, and untenured professors approached the TSJ to issue an injunction regarding the decanal elections that were scheduled to be held later that month.\footnote{This is an excellent example of the internal political discord within the universities themselves.} This group argued that the electoral register which the university intended to use violated Article 34.3 of the Organic Education Law because it did not allow all members of the university community to participate equally. Four days after the injunction was granted, the TSJ suspended the elections and gave the Central University 30 days to change the elections act in accordance with the law. The court’s stated rationale for these suspensions was to force the universities to apply new democratic standards to their internal administrative affairs, a position generally consistent with the discourses of participatory democracy and twenty-first century socialism swirling around reform efforts up to that point. The fact that the suspensions were imposed before the university elections happened — in other words, before the universities actually violated the Organic Law — functioned as a sort of pre-emptive indictment that prevented the institutions from electing new leaders who would almost certainly be hostile to the government.

The judicial suspensions imposed by Venezuela’s high court also allowed the executive branch to reinforce the existing narrative about illegitimate and undemocratic governance within these formally autonomous institutions. By refusing to hold elections according to the dictates of national law, it argued, the university authorities were violating the tradition of democratic
university governance and hiding from accountability to the Venezuelan people.\textsuperscript{116} Yet there was also a cost to this strategy: the court’s prohibition of internal elections meant that the existing authorities, who had clearly already proven to be defiant, remained in their positions even after their terms expired. Rather than expel or replace authorities with new leaders hand-picked by the Ministry, a move that would clearly violate even the most flexible definition of university autonomy and lead to chaos within those institutions, the rebellious authorities were able to keep their platforms and remain in their formal positions of power, even if their decision-making prerogative was undermined. Sure enough, the state’s preservation of the autonomous universities’ executive leadership had an important role in increasing organizational cohesion in the 2010 episode of contention about the University Education Law.

The 2008 electoral suspension at the Central University turned out to be the first of many. Between May 2010 and the October 2012 presidential election, the Supreme Tribunal of Justice imposed 20 judicial rulings against all five autonomous universities and four internally democratic (but not yet formally autonomous) experimental universities: Lisandro Alvarado University, Libertador Pedagogical University, Táchira University, and the National Polytechnic University. The very first sentence was levied against the Lisandro Alvarado Central Western University (UCLA) in Barquisimeto, the first public university to hold elections following the adoption of the Organic Law. UCLA is an experimental university but, like several others of this kind, was in the process of becoming formally autonomous.\textsuperscript{117} Its transitional status meant that it

\textsuperscript{116} It is also ironic, as several sources pointed out to me during discussions of the suspensions, that the experimental or state-supervised universities (with the exceptions of Simón Bolívar University, Táchira National Experimental University, Libertador Experimental University, Antonio José de Sucre Experimental University, and Lisandro Alvarado University) do not have any internal elections. Had the Chávez administration so decided, implementing fully participatory elections in these non-autonomous institutions would have been far easier than undertaking the task in the resistant autonomous universities.

\textsuperscript{117} The possibility of transitioning from an experimental to autonomous institution was provided for in the 1970 Universities Law and its accompanying 1971 bylaws, and although several universities were in the process, none had fully become autonomous.
occupied an ambiguous place in relation to the state; it had enough *de facto* autonomy to hold routine internal elections but it lacked the *de jure* legal authority of the formally autonomous universities. The suspension was therefore somewhat less risky for the state, for although members of that university community would surely object, the university administration could not claim that the court violated formal autonomy.

My own fieldwork trip coincided not only with the suspension of the top executive leadership of the Central University but with the introduction of another type of legal intervention in the affairs of the country’s largest autonomous university. Two weeks after my arrival in early May, the TSJ suspended the election for the UCV’s top executive authorities scheduled to occur on June 8, 2012. This ruling was entirely expected given the precedent at other institutions. What was not expected was the accompanying fine of 18,000 bolívares (approximately $4300 CAD at the official exchange rate at the time) on each member of the University Council who voted to hold the election despite the orders of the court. Two individuals were not fined: the member appointed by the government to represent the Ministry of University Education and the only other openly *chavista* member of the Council. Officials within the Central University interpreted the fine as especially punitive because it targeted individuals, not the University Council as a corporate body; whereas if the Council itself were fined it could pay through the university’s own channels, fines against individuals would have to come out of pocket.

This fine was novel (though there have been similar fines in other sectors), but so too was what happened next. Merely four days after the Electoral Chamber imposed the fine, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice intervened, declared that the right to vote in university elections is an academic rather than political right (therefore outside the scope of the Electoral Chamber), and suspended the fine (however, it did not address the suspension of
the elections, which as of April 2016 still have not been held). It is not clear why the Constitutional Chamber interjected in this way, and it does not appear that there was a formal request to do so. Some sources at the Central University speculated that perhaps Bolivarian elites did not want to antagonize the Central University only five months before the presidential election, particularly because the university community threatened to pay the fine by mobilizing the university community and its sympathizers. Manuel Rachadell, the director of legal counsel at the Central University, believed that the conflict between the chambers illustrated ideological division and a certain territoriality over the scope of judicial responsibility (personal interview, 2012). Whereas the Electoral Chamber was populated by particularly radical figures, he suggested, the Constitutional Chamber was closer to the government and more sensitive to political pressures, and may therefore have taken some direction from the executive branch. Whatever the reason, the conflict between the two chambers meant that the fine was removed from the university agenda as it had to be resolved within the TSJ itself first.

These suspensions and the fine against the University Council at the Central University are directly relevant to the discussion of university-state relations for three reasons. First, they indicate unquestionable incursions on university autonomy as traditionally practiced in Venezuela. Even if an argument can be made that the suspensions were justified, as the Supreme Tribunal of Justice did, the state’s interference in the internal administrative affairs of these institutions was inconsistent with their routinized democratic electoral practices and, at least in the case of the autonomous universities, the autonomy guaranteed in the standing 1970 Universities Law.

Second, the sanctions represent a shift in the state’s strategy of engaging the universities. No longer was it content with bypassing existing institutions, as it did with the National Universities
Council in 2005, or with creating parallel organizations, as it did with the Bolivarian Missions and Bolivarian University in 2003. The suspensions were a new form of direct state engagement with individual universities, highly focused penalties on institutions that did not immediately acquiesce to reform directives. The state autonomy and capacity that enabled the Chávez administration to design and adopt new legislation did not have the same effect at the implementation stage, where the universities demonstrated adequate autonomy and capacity to resist the law.

Finally, the resistance the state faced at the implementation stage reinforces some basic elements of the arguments put forward by Migdal (1994, 2001), Grindle (2004), and Grindle and Thomas (1991). This process echoed that of the educational decentralization reforms that swept across Latin America in the 1990s, where "the most active proponents of education policy were found in capital cities" prior to implementation, but "as soon as efforts were made to put the reforms into practice [...] alternative sites for conflict emerged" (Grindle, 2004, p. 22). The locus of contention moved away from the state's commanding heights and central field offices, away from the Ministry of University Education and the National Assembly in Caracas, and into the institutional structures of the de facto and de jure autonomous universities. As this stage of reform, contention migrated not only spatially, as it fanned out to different institutions across Venezuelan territory, but also institutionally; whereas reformers typically encounter resistance in the "trenches" of the state when they attempt to "execute state directives directly in the face of possibly strong social resistance" (Migdal, 2001, p. 16), the autonomy enjoyed by these public universities meant that the task of implementation itself was ultimately up to the authorities of those institutions. Short of stripping the universities of this autonomy or otherwise directly intervening, the state could not force the governing boards to adopt new electoral statutes. The
task of implementation therefore shifted from the state alone and into the more ambiguous social realm of the state-university borderlands.

The 2009 Organic Education Law continues to be the major piece of legislation governing Venezuela's higher education system, but in the context of the autonomous universities it remains largely ignored. As of April 2016, the autonomous universities have still refused to hold elections according to the requirements of the legislation (exhibiting what James C. Scott [1985] might refer to as a "reluctant compliance" [p. 26] to abide by the suspensions while still defying the original court rulings), and the state refuses to permit elections organized in the traditional manner.\footnote{There is one partial exception to this state of affairs. In July 2012 Táchira National Experimental University (UNET), another experimental institution that elects its own rectors from a predetermined list drawn up by the Ministry, partially acquiesced to the TSJ prior to being subjected to a precautionary suspension. UNET changed their electoral code to permit everyone (professors, students, workers and administrators) to vote. However, the university did not change the voting system to one that was proportional, and continued to reserve a disproportionate amount of electoral power for professors.} Despite the transformative intent of this law, in other words, it led only to an enduring stalemate between state power and the university opposition.

The 2010 University Education Law

With the 2009 Organic Education Law officially serving as the legal basis for the Venezuelan educational system, difficulties with implementation notwithstanding, state elites were emboldened to pursue further educational reforms in the legislative arena. The general political climate in Venezuela remained one of seemingly intractable political polarization, with citizens bitterly divided about the legitimacy of the Chávez government and the status of national democracy. Institutionally, both the Chávez government and the state had more power than ever before, with the government fresh from its 2009 referendum victory and the state better able to assert greater control over the university sector due to the adoption of the Organic Education Law and the suspension of university elections. This shift in the balance of state-university power is an important factor that distinguishes the conditions of the 2009 case from the 2010
case. Whereas previous incursions on university autonomy were confined to matters of institutional design and bureaucratic procedure, by 2010 the internal affairs of autonomous institutions were subject to formal state sanction. The further accumulation of power in the state relative to the universities allowed the Chávez government to control every stage of the reform process.

Setting the Agenda and Designing the Legislation

As in 2001, the decision to introduce a new law in the National Assembly was driven not only by the interests of the Chávez government or Ministry of University Education but by widespread pressure from a variety of social forces, all of whom agreed that the 1970 Universities Law was obsolete. This time, however, reform advocates from within the oppositional university sector already had two proposals ready to give to the Ministry. One was a proposal prepared by a group of professors affiliated with the Assembly of Education (published in October 2010), colloquially referred to as the UCAB draft because more than half of the participants came from the Andrés Bello Catholic University.\(^{119}\) The other proposal, published in November 2010, was jointly prepared by commissions affiliated with the Central University and AVERU, and was informally referred to as the UCV draft. Unlike in 2001, however, when the MVR had to take into consideration the social pressure for a new organic law, in 2010 the state had more autonomy (and the university sector less), which allowed the Ministry to devise a bill without seeking input from the educational public. Formal consultation with a wide range of universities and civil society actors may have been limited during the design stage of the Organic Education Law in 2009, but it was entirely absent in 2010. The government unilaterally set the agenda for new legislation and completely bypassed any substantive input from the oppositional

\(^{119}\) Despite the institutional affiliation of the draft, professors from the Central University, Simón Bolívar University, and the Libertador Experimental Pedagogical University also helped to prepare the document.
universities or relevant civil society organizations during the design process, a luxury it could afford because of its own prior actions.

Publicly available details about the specific policymaking processes that resulted in the new higher education proposal are few and far between. Policy antecedents included records of discussions held within the Ministry of Higher Education in 2003, a higher education reform proposal initially authored by higher education minister Héctor Navarro in 2004, a report submitted by the Presidential Commission for Popular Student Power in 2007, and a document outlining possible avenues of transformation for university institutes and colleges in 2008. In 2010, Simón Rodríguez Experimental University rector Mirian Balestrini and Bolivarian University professor Magaldy Tellez revised the 2004 proposal prepared by Navarro (Balestrini and Téllez, 2010), and in November 2010 Education Commission president María de Queipo noted that there was a “possibility” that a new university law would be brought to the legislature for discussion by the end of the legislative and calendar year (Méndez, 24 November 2010). On December 8, 2010, the Balestrini and Tellez draft was released to the public as a University Education bill, and on December 20 it was introduced to the National Assembly.

Given the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the state and the autonomous universities during this period, it is not surprising that the universities were not consulted during the design process. One important difference between the 2009 and 2010 episodes, however, is that the growing autonomy of the executive branch allowed the Ministry to bypass not just oppositional social forces but elements of chavismo too. María de Queipo, who first hinted that a new law was imminent and who stood beside Chávez when he signed the Organic Law sixteen months prior, this time appeared to have relatively little knowledge of the bill. In fact, on the day the draft of the University Education Law was released for public consideration she indicated
that it had not been presented to the Assembly and that she could not comment on its contents (Penaloza, 2010). Whether this silence was because she had not actually seen the bill or because she was not authorized or willing to speak about it is unclear. However, it was a significant difference from the 2001 case, where civil society groups participated extensively in crafting the draft ultimately proposed by the Assembly’s Education Commission, and even from the 2009 case, when the same legislative organization solicited input from select stakeholders. In 2010, the executive seemed to have simply bypassed the National Assembly altogether.

Whatever the finer details of the circumstances surround its design, the University Education bill introduced in December 2010 was an ambitious document that sought to completely transform the university system. For the government and its supporters, this was a long overdue initiative that was essential to achieving the social mandate of the Bolivarian Revolution. No longer would university education be a scarce resource available only to a privileged few; instead, the new law would ensure that it would become a genuinely public good accessible to all Venezuelans. The text of the draft itself made this political intent clear. Various articles explicitly conceptualized universities and university education itself as assisting “the construction of a socialist society” (Art. 3.1) and the development of a “socialist productive model” (Art. 64) in order to achieve “socio-productive sovereignty for a Socialist Homeland” (Art. 14). The Teaching State continued to be a major focus and an engine for “construct[ing] a collective will committed to the process of social transformation alongside the principles of sovereignty and self-determination” (Art. 5.1) and the “strengthening of Popular Power” (Art. 5.2). Participatory and protagonist democracy, too, remained central themes, such as a provision that called for the “democratization of admissions” (Art. 4.5) and which further empowered the state to determine how and why students were admitted to autonomous universities.
Like the Organic Law before it, the University Education Law revised the meaning of university autonomy, but this time to such a significant extent it became almost unrecognizable, something loosely akin to “conceptual stretching” that produces “indefiniteness and elusiveness” in an attempt to expand a concept to make it applicable to new cases or evidence (Sartori, 1970, 1034). The bill listed university autonomy as one of the core values of university education:

the principle and hierarchy that grants the university the ability to direct university governance under the terms established by the Constitution, the Organic Law of Education, this law, and other laws of the Republic set by the democratic state, law, and justice. Autonomy includes the ethical exercise of this competency, governed by the principles of cooperation, solidarity, and shared responsibility for fulfilling its highest mission in guarding the identity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation (4.1).

The specific attributes of this Bolivarian vision of university autonomy were subsequently discussed in Article 17, where it was invested with three distinct dimensions. First, it stipulated that university autonomy in Bolivarian Venezuela must correspond to the consolidation and defence of national and Latin American sovereignty and independence, factors that were also mentioned in the 2009 Organic Law. Second, the bill stipulated that university autonomy must be exercised through the principle of academic freedom and the practice of intellectual debate. This was more explicit than in the 1970 law, which limited its considerations of this issue to the general principle of openness to “all currents of universal thought” which were to be “discussed and analyzed in a scientifically rigorous manner” (Art. 4).

Finally, the new legislation reinforced the 2009 Organic Law by stating that university autonomy was to be achieved through “participatory and protagonist democracy in equal conditions for students, academic workers, administrative employees, and labourers” in areas of management, training, budgets, academic and administrative structures, and academic practice.

\[\text{There is a change in nomenclature here from professor to academic worker. The word professor does not appear in the law.}\]
(Art. 4). Article 65 further institutionalized the inclusion of administrative employees and workers by naming them as members of the university community who shared “all the rights and obligations specified in the Constitution, laws, bylaws and other applicable rules.” As members, administrative employees and workers were guaranteed organized participation in: 1) the definition, execution, evaluation and control of structures, plans and programs related to intellectual creation, training, and interaction with communities; 2) academic and administrative management; 3) the exercise of academic freedom as established in the Organic Law; 4) the definition of internal rules; 5) the development, management, and control of the university budget and other resources, and 6) the election of representatives for sectors of the university community (Art. 84). With respect to electoral participation in particular, the relevant part of the law read that

In universities, all sectors of the university community will exercise, in equal conditions, the political right of participation to elect authorities and representatives before collegial organs. The university community consists of: students enrolled at any level and in any program; academic workers independent of their condition and category; and administrative employees and labourers on the university payroll. Equality of conditions in electoral participation of the university community involves the quantification of one vote per voter for the purposes of determining electoral results (Art. 86).

In this, the University Education Law fleshed out what was promised in the Organic Education Law: electoral parity and the extension of full membership to professors of all ranks (including sessional instructors) and the administrative workers and labourers responsible for ensuring the day to day operations of the institutions.

These electoral and administrative changes were accompanied by the complete reorganization of the major governing bodies within each university and the university system at large. The National Universities Council would be replaced by a National Council of University Transformation that gave significantly more power to the state (Art. 21), and the autonomous and
experimental universities would be replaced with “official” and “popular” institutions of university education (Art 14). Every university was to gain a University Transformation Assembly responsible for various activities meant to ensure that each institution participated in the process of participatory, protagonist transformation. As the “highest organ[s] of reflection, deliberation and decision” in each university (Art. 91), the Assemblies superseded the University Councils codified in the 1970 Universities Law. The University Councils themselves were to be replaced by University Executive Councils tasked with determining the strategic direction of each university and carrying out academic, financial and administrative management. These new Executive Councils differed from the previous University Councils in several ways, including in their composition (again giving the state more power; see Table 4.3) and ability to determine their own electoral affairs. Electoral matters would instead fall to a bylaw to be established by the state once the University Education Law was passed, effectively excising decisions about university elections from the scope of independent university power.

Table 4.3. Comparison of Main Governing Councils in the 1970 Law and 2010 Bill

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>University Council (1970)</th>
<th>Executive Council (2010)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rector</td>
<td>1 (presides)</td>
<td>1 (presides)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Rectors</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0 (position eliminated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deans</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>0 (position eliminated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative employees</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The installation of new governing bodies by the state, the reaffirmation of administrative employees and workers as rights-bearing members of the university community, and the requirement of electoral parity for all such members transformed the purpose and provision of university education to something never before approximated in Venezuelan law. While previous
administrations before and after democratization in 1958 semi-regularly undermined, removed or violated university autonomy, its meaning as the right of universities to govern themselves and pursue their own goals remained essentially stable. The Chávez government’s approach changed both what autonomy meant and how it was to be achieved, linking the concept of university autonomy to much larger political goals not directly connected with higher education and specifying the conditions within which it could be exercised. This created inherent conflict between those who supported the right and concept of university autonomy as traditionally practiced, and those who welcomed this new, radical iteration.

The Introduction, Adoption, and "Veto"

When Minister Ramírez published the draft law on December 8, 2010, the reaction from the autonomous universities was swift and scornful. Although the rapidity with which the law was presented surprised many, quick oppositional coordination was facilitated by the fact that the connections established and/or politicized in 2009 were still viable. Within the week, students, rectors and faculty from autonomous and some private and experimental universities began to protest in major university cities across the country. Ultimately such attempts to influence the state went unheeded, and on December 20, less than two weeks after the public saw the initial draft, the University Education Law — one of 19 other bills introduced within a 12 day period — was introduced and approved (its first of two required readings) by the outgoing legislature. National Assembly president Cilia Flores thanked deputies for their quick action on passing what she described as an urgent law and left it to the Education Commission to introduce for a second reading. Deputies abided by this exhortation and began to debate the law for a second time a day later, on December 22, 2010. Representatives from opposition parties Podemos, Frente Humanista y Ecológico and Patria Para Todos argued with chavista legislators into the night, and
at 2:50 a.m. on December 23, 2010, the University Education Law was officially approved by the Venezuelan National Assembly. Following a rendition of the national anthem and a round of cheers from government deputies, members of the opposition withstood heckling as they formally restated their parties’ position that the law was anti-democratic and unconstitutional. After these brief interventions, Assembly vice-president Dario Vivas wished legislators a merry Christmas and adjourned the legislature at 3 o’clock a.m.

What occurred next was truly extraordinary. If the 2009 Organic Law resulted in a tidal wave of protest specific to educational legislation, the circumstances surrounding the University Education Law in December 2010 unleashed a veritable tsunami. In less than seven hours after the Assembly passed the law, university authorities, professors and students flooded into the streets of Caracas, Mérida, and other major university centres, expressing vituperative opposition not just to the contents of the new law but to the way in which it was approved. These protests carried on throughout Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day, gaining rather than losing momentum. In the end, the University Education Law met a fate similar though not identical to the 2001 Organic Education Law: once again, President Chávez intervened and quashed the bill put forward by members of his own governing party. Despite its quick approval by the legislature and the fact that all he had to do to make it part of the Venezuelan legal landscape was to put his signature to the parchment, on January 4, 2011, the first day of the new legislative year, the president instead announced on television that he would “veto”122 the law for “technical” and “political” reasons. This time, he did not invoke Sammy

121 This can be viewed online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gv1DOGgU-w.
122 Technically the president did not “veto” the law, although this is the language that both sides of the fracas use to describe what happened. Article 214 of the 1999 Constitution allows the president to ask the legislature to reconsider bills in whole or in part, and that if an absolute majority of the National Assembly approves it again, he must accept and promulgate it within five days. In this case, Chávez “vetoed” the bill passed by the Assembly on the last day of the legislative term, meaning that the bill would need to go through the entire legislative process once more. Therefore, although it was not technically a “veto,” the effect was essentially the same.
Sosa’s bat, but instead the outpouring of opposition from university authorities, professors, students, unions, civil society organizations, and even members of his own cabinet. “I have been reviewing, listening,” he said. “This is a government that is listening. We are far from what the opposition says: that I am a dictator, a tyrant.”123 With that, the bill — along with one other piece of legislation that would raise the value added tax by two percent — was sent back to the National Assembly for review and revision. On January 11, 2011, legislators formally withdrew the University Education Law.

This outcome, so different than that of the Organic Education Law just sixteen months earlier, requires explanation. The president had almost two years left of his second term, and just a few months earlier, in September 2010, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV, formerly the MVR) secured another legislative majority with 96 out of 185 seats.124 Additionally, Chávez did not hesitate to push forward with other controversial pieces of legislation during this period in late December, most notably a fourth Enabling Act ostensibly needed to address the devastation wrought by the historic rains that caused flooding, mudslides, and the displacement of thousands. There is therefore no question that the president had the requisite formal institutional channels to enact the bill.

Why, then, did Chávez concede to the opposition and decline to sign the law? Again, the relative balance of state-university power shaped the decisions made by political elites. In this regard there were three critical differences that separated the responses in 2009 and 2010. First, whereas in 2009 the universities were unable to generate and sustain significant protest against the legislation after it was adopted by the Assembly, largely limiting themselves to isolated

123 This can be viewed online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3om3Szze1_0.
124 In 2007 Chávez announced plans to create a new United Socialist Party of Venezuela that absorbed the MVR and a number of other pro-Chávez parties. The PSUV replaced the MVR as the governing party in the September 2010 election.
institutional responses, in 2010 a much more interinstitutionally united university sector focused on large-scale public demonstrations that carried through the holiday break. This sustained response was possible due to the reactivation of connections that were previously established or mobilized for political ends in 2009. Already primed for political pugilism, actors were able to generate significant organizational capacity that enabled them to form a united front against the government despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that the Assembly had already approved the bill.

Second, the university opposition activated and promoted a more cohesive interpretive frame that located the government’s efforts and their own defensive response in a much larger historical context. Moving away from procedural considerations, the universities drew upon famous historical struggles for autonomy, most notably those during the administrations of Juan Vicente Gómez (especially in 1928), Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1957-58), and Rafael Caldera (1969-1970). In contrast, the Chávez government, with its new and relatively unfamiliar definition of Bolivarian autonomy, stuck with the less institutionalized and less culturally resonant university transformation frame. The opposition therefore did a much better job at mobilizing its symbolic resources than the government.

Finally, there was also a sharp decline in the organizational capacity of the educational bureaucracy. Ministerial turnover and reservations expressed by ex-ministers and university authorities at pro-Chávez institutions indicated there would be substantial cost to the implementation stage of this reform, putting into question its long-term viability. Without the technical capabilities or political will to oversee changes in the "trenches" (Migdal, 2001) of the university, reform was simply not possible. This reduction in the organizational capacity of the Ministry and educational bureaucracy essentially functioned as a window of political opportunity.
for the oppositional universities, making their challenges to the state much more difficult to dismiss.

*The Mobilization of the Oppositional Universities*

The increased organizational capacity of the oppositional university sector was not caused by the creation of new connective structures or the entrance of new actors, but by the fact that existing connective structures were prioritized and used in slightly different ways in 2010 than in 2009. University Councils, for example, which were front and centre in challenging the Organic Education Law, were not quite so prominent in 2010. This was at least in part because of their members’ greater awareness of the limited range of responses available to the Councils, which could be called into permanent session, vote to condemn legislation, and file formal legal challenges, but which had neither the institutional power nor the historical precedent to effectively summon large members of students, professors and supporters to the streets. This does not mean that the University Councils were weak(er) *per se*, but rather that their members preferred to focus on other channels of mobilization. In fact, the executive authorities at all of the autonomous institutions were more politically experienced and therefore more capable of leading the charge against the law than they were in 2009. Every one of the rectors, vice-rectors and secretaries at the oppositional universities during 2009 retained the same positions in 2010, whether because they were not yet up for re-election (as in the case of the Central University and the Universities of Los Andes, Zulia and Carabobo) or because the Supreme Tribunal of Justice forbade them from holding elections in the first place (Lisando Alvarado Experimental University, the National Polytechnic University, the Eastern University). Instead of using their positions to address their grievances through the University Councils, these authorities turned to
less formal methods of political organization that deemphasized the hierarchical divisions between authorities, professors and students.

The period between late December and early January saw intensive cooperation and communication between authorities, professors, students, and in some cases even administrative employees and workers at each of the autonomous universities. At the University of Zulia the presidents of the Federation of Student Centres (FCU), the Employees’ Association, Workers’ Syndicate and Professors’ Association published an open letter to the government requesting more time for public debate of the law. They also began to plan various demonstrations that occurred in Maracaibo on January 7, 10, and 13, 2011. A similar pattern was also evident at the Central University, which by virtue of its location in Caracas and its historical status as the ‘crown jewel’ of Venezuela, became the epicentre of the protests. The president of the FCU, Diego Scharifker, described extensive communication and collaboration with the top executive authorities and Professors’ Association:

During that moment in December there was a lot of cooperation between the rectors, the president of the teachers’ association, the students who organized the protest, and the [workers] and administrators […] During December we met basically every day to organize protest activities, with what we call the cuarteto, [Rector] García Arocha, Bernardo [Méndez, Administrative Vice-Rector], Amalio [Belmonte, Secretary] and [Academic Vice-Rector] Bianco, and with the president of the teachers’ association, with other teachers that supported or collaborated with the students, and the different members of the student movement within the university (Scharifker, 2012b).

Scharifker’s account is indicative of a mechanism that Charles Tilly refers to as boundary deactivation. Whereas boundary activation “consists of [a boundary] becoming more salient as an organizer of social relations on either side of it, of social relations across it, or of shared representations on either side, deactivation consists of a decline in that boundary’s salience” (Tilly, 2004, p. 223). Both activation and deactivation produce changes in the structure or
composition of networks engaged in making contentious claims. In this case, the deactivation of boundaries between professors, students, and their respective organizations ensured greater coordination because they were no longer limited by the formal constraints of institutional governance bodies. Deactivation also signalled an important shift from the 2009 episode, when the dominant frame emphasizing universities as hierarchical, meritocratic institutions reinforced the power and status differentials between members of the university community. Here the state-university boundary was as strong as ever, but the intrauniversity boundary retracted.

Scharifker’s account of his time as student leader during this particular flurry of activity contains some implicit information about additional interorganizational connections that did not exist in 2009. Diego Scharifker is the son of Benjamin Scharifker, then the Rector at Simón Bolívar University, one of the experimental universities most active in protesting the law. The senior Scharifker had been an outspoken critic of the government for some time and was one of the participants involved in drafting the UCAB proposal mentioned above. Although he and his son disagreed about particular elements of university reform and did not work closely together during this episode of contention, the ease with which Diego held himself around top executive authorities indicated a certain insider status. In particular, the way that the student activist referred to Secretary Belmonte and Administrative Vice-Rector Méndez in the above quotation — by their given names rather than their surnames — implies a degree of familiarity that the FCU presidents preceding and following him did not share. This filial link strengthened the intrauniversity connection between the executive authorities and student union at the Central University of Venezuela and simultaneously reinforced the link between autonomous and experimental universities.
The Sharifker connection is relevant to the issue of organizational cohesion, but its importance should not be overstated. The most consequential interorganizational ties during this period remained those that were already mobilized in service of direct political engagement with the state in 2009. The Venezuelan Association of University Rectors (AVERU), already baptized into political struggle in response to the Organic Law, this time had two distinct advantages. First, it had a more outspoken leader. Central University rector Cecilia García Arocha replaced UNEXPO rector Rita Elena Añez as the new head of the association, increasing its legitimacy and visibility by virtue of her own position as the chief executive at Venezuela’s premier university. García Arocha spoke frequently and forcefully, appearing often in Venezuelan print and broadcast media to criticize the proposed legislation and the government itself. Second, AVERU’s credibility was further enhanced by its recourse to the proposal it presented that November, just before the state’s draft was released. This comprehensive, technically sophisticated bill demonstrated a keen familiarity with the legislative process and augmented the organization’s status as a legitimate, knowledgeable advocate for public university education. AVERU continuously pointed to its own proposal as a viable alternative even after the Assembly approved the legislation, reminding both the state and the Venezuelan public that they had other options.

Professors and students also swung into action against the law as soon as it was introduced in the Assembly. Between December 23, 2010, and January 3, 2011, FAPUV, the FCU, and groups independent of both organizations made it clear to the government that the universities were not going to cease their protest activities, much less adopt the controversial provisions within their respective institutions. FAPUV, which was one of the first organizations to organize public demonstrations, linked its objections to the law to its ongoing dispute over salaries and again
encouraged its member groups to participate in the protests following the legislation’s approval (FAPUV, 2011). By taking this approach FAPUV fulfilled basically the same role as it did in 2009. A much more consequential change occurred in the student sector. This time the FCU functioned like a viable, integrated federation rather than a loosely organized group of discrete campus-based student groups. Like the executive authorities at their respective institutions, the same FCU presidents remained in power at the autonomous universities in Zulia, Mérida (Los Andes), and Carabobo in 2010 as in 2009. Prominent student activists in more informal leadership positions also reappeared to challenge the government. These student activists, who were at such an organizational disadvantage in 2009 because of the fallout from the 2007 mobilizations, were this time able to draw upon what they learned and the connections they built when they protested the Organic Education Law.

The fact that the FCU functioned as a stronger federation in 2010 than in 2009 does not meant that the student movement engaged in institutional problem solving. The very nature of the student movement — amorphous, decentralized and often full of internal contradictions — has historically ensured that the forms of resistance favoured by university authorities and professors, such as court challenges, are not within its common repertoire. Instead students take to highly visible and often disruptive forms of protest, including sit-ins, hunger strikes, marches, and in some cases violence against the objects of their claims. So it was after the National Assembly passed the University Education Law. Students initiated and publicized many of the most spectacular incidents of protest beginning on the morning of December 23, when they and supportive, outraged professors attempted to march from the Rectorate to the National Assembly only to be met with water cannons and birdshot (BBC, 2010). This and similar marches often

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125 The FCU presidents at campuses of the Eastern University remained broadly supportive of the government but even they sought more time for discussion and debate about the legislation.
included students from the other autonomous universities as well as experimental and private institutions, some of whom used the Christmas break to travel to Caracas to confront the Chávez government.

Because of their relative institutionalization and high profile compared to other groups involved in protesting the law, AVERU, FAPUV, and the FCU were the most prominent bodies to publicly challenge the law. These formal structures did not have a monopoly on mobilization, however, and coexisted with more grassroots, informal, and/or less organized resistance to the legislation, including a new National University Autonomy Defence Front organized by FAPUV and chaired by Cecilia García Arocha. A new Student Front in Defence of the Constitution, which claimed membership of over 500 students and young professionals from autonomous, experimental and private universities, also originated from the University of Zulia. These informal groups did not have the organizational or material resources of the official federations and associations, but contributed to the strengthening of interuniversity bonds that allowed the oppositional university sector to unite as one. Again, both the institutional boundaries between universities and the hierarchical boundaries within them were dulled in service of greater organizational strength and coordination.

Of course, the interorganizational opposition to the law was not absolute. As in 2009, the bill had support within elements of the student sector and the professoriate, even within the autonomous universities. Yet these student groups operated largely outside institutional university politics, sometimes fielding candidates for positions in their local FCU (successfully in the Eastern University) but often eschewing institutional politics altogether. Groups such as M-28, the radical pro-Chávez group that stormed the Rectorate at the Central University in 2001, actively supported the bill by promoting marches, speaking to the press, and confronting
oppositional students. Given that the law had already been approved by the legislature, these
demonstrations were more symbolic than they were actual attempts to curry public enthusiasm
for the legislation. The Bolivarian student movement, such as it existed, was more of a
cheerleader for the autonomous state than an influential force pressing forward with its own
demands.

*The Near-Absence of the Party Opposition*

The comprehensive interorganizational cooperation and mobilization within and between
universities in response to the new higher education legislation indicated the growing capacity of
oppositional universities to resist the law. In marked contrast to the 2009 episode of contention,
however, non-university forces had a very limited role in these protests. The private and religious
organizations that were concerned with the impact of Organic Law on basic and secondary
education did not join the universities in active protest, with their members instead opting to
prioritize participation in existing bodies like AVERU or the student movement. The Assembly
of Education, still headed by Leonardo Carvajal, was a notable exception in this regard. The
private media also had a lesser role, although it did provide extensive coverage of the protests.
This is because unlike the Organic Law, the University Education Law did not contain additional
provisions that directly affected the media and therefore those organizations did not have an
immediate interest in actively protesting. Additionally, the protestors themselves relied less on
major media outlets in order to communicate about their activities. They continued to air their
grievances in newspapers and on radio or television, but for the purposes of coordination turned
to social media, giving them a real-time advantage as they mobilized against the state. Twitter
proved to be an especially important tool for activists in coordinating demonstrations,\textsuperscript{126} and not just for students; authorities at many oppositional universities also made bullhorns of their 140 characters to disparage the legislation and call for resistance.

The most important withdrawal by non-university social forces was by the opposition parties now part of the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) coalition, including Un Nuevo Tiempo, Primero Justicia, and Acción Democrática. Whereas party representatives and other politicians were very prominent in 2009, they had a fairly marginal role in the resistance staged by members of the university community in 2010. Diego Scharifker, a member of Un Nuevo Tiempo since 2008, noted in an interview that at these protests “there were just members of the university. There was very little contact with parties, with the MUD. It was just us getting organized and protesting every day.” He continued:

\begin{quote}
In 2009 there was more of a relationship with political parties, and even though that’s not bad, there were different interests. Because it wasn’t the protest by the education movement, seeing as there were universities, middle schools, high schools etc., but there was a lot more political discussion inside. So that’s why you see some politicians involved much more with it than members of the university of the student movement, while 2010 was purely of the universities. Really there was no involvement, apart from two or three members of the National Assembly like [Podemos deputy] Ismael García. Apart from them there was very little involvement [from politicians] (Scharifker, personal interview, 2012b).
\end{quote}

While Scharifker’s perception of the relative absence of parties applies only to the connections of such organizations to the student sector, and is not indicative of any connections that may have existed with other constituencies, it does appear to be the case that the opposition parties were far less present in the mobilization throughout this period.

\textsuperscript{126} According to one 2010 report (ComScore, 2010), Venezuela ranks fifth in the world for Twitter usage, with 19% of its population using the service regularly. One ComScore analyst attributes its popularity to the fact that Chávez joined in April 2010, precipitating a four percent increase in use.
This conspicuous absence of parties should not be interpreted as an indicator of party weakness, for the results of the September 2010 legislative election showed that the opposition was finally regaining strength after its self-sabotage in 2005. Although it still had a majority, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela lost 41 seats in the National Assembly and the opposition parties, having abandoned the idea of boycotting electoral politics, gained 59 seats as part of the MUD coalition (see Table 4.4). Additionally, the popular vote was split, with 48.2 percent of voters casting ballots for the PSUV and 47.2 percent opting for the MUD, indicating that after six years of considerable organizational weakness, the party opposition was finally rebounding.

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<th>Table 4.4. National Assembly Election Results, 2000-2010</th>
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<td>Movimiento V República (MVR) (PSUV as of 2010)</td>
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<td>Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD) 127</td>
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<td>Acción Democrática (AD)</td>
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<td>Por la Democracia Social (Podemos)</td>
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<td>Others</td>
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Instead, the relative absence of the party opposition was due to two factors. First, it was recovering from the hard-fought election it went through three months prior to the introduction of the legislation. The election campaign required a tremendous amount of organizational resources that could not be shored up again in order to oppose a specific piece of legislation. Second, the University Education Law was one of many other bills being rushed through the Assembly in the last days of the government’s two-thirds majority, many of which also commanded the opposition’s attention. Although deputies from Podemos and other opposition

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parties tried their best to contest the law from their seats in the legislature, the opposition could not muster the same force as in 2009, particularly considering the hastiness with which the bill was introduced, read, and approved. There was neither the time nor the organizational resources to mount an effective, focused challenge from within the Assembly.

When taken in sum, the constellation of opposition to the University Education Law was somewhat similar but certainly not identical to that which opposed the Organic Education Law almost a year and a half earlier. The general players remained the same — students, professors, and university authorities — but in the 2010-11 episode they had more experience and were better able to mobilize their constituents against the legislation. Students in particular demonstrated a keener ability to encourage mass mobilization outside of institutional channels, making use of new technologies and youthful outrage to drive protests throughout the Christmas and New Year break. Finally, unencumbered by self-interested political parties and candidates, the universities could focus on the singular goal of getting the government to dismiss the legislation. Unlike in 2009, the response in 2010-11 was fast and furious.

Reframing University Autonomy

The strong interorganizational connections that allowed the universities to act as united political actors, or as “combatants in the political arena” (de Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002, p. 473), were not the only sources of organizational cohesion. The opposition’s ability to advance compelling frames that justified their outrage had a notable effect on its ability to sustain protest through the Christmas and New Year break. The greater participation of the student movement in this period also led to the modification of the autonomy frame previously advanced by oppositional professors. Whereas the professoriate’s initial frames reinforced the perception of the universities as bastions of privilege, the dominant interpretive framework in 2010-11 focused
much more on comparisons with earlier struggles over university autonomy, independence, and democracy. In this way university autonomy was revived in the national consciousness as an immediate political issue, highly specific to the potential impact of the University Education Law and broad enough to situate it in a much longer view of political history.

The university autonomy interpretive frame advanced by the oppositional universities in 2010 had two key features. The first, as with the 2009 frame, was an emphasis on threat or injustice faced by the public universities. However, this time the oppositional universities framed this injustice not as diagnostic but as an incitement to act (Snow and Benford, 2000); the rhetorical stakes shifted from emphasizing how the new legislation threatened the meritocratic character of the university to stressing how university autonomy could only be preserved by the concerted mobilization of the university community in its explicit defense. The legislation, and the new version of autonomy it included, would essentially “liquidate” the autonomous university, they intimated, causing a reversion back to patterns of centralized authority not seen since the Catholic Church controlled universities in thirteenth century Europe (Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2010). If the autonomous university was an embodiment of independence and democracy, such sweeping changes could only foretell a profound reversion to some sort of highly centralized, autocratic rule. The preference cleavage over the issue of electoral parity that so separated professors and students in 2009 was not as salient or divisive here, even though parity remained a major part of the reform. The perceived threat to university autonomy writ large, however, and the injunction to coordinate a response, overshadowed that tension and united both major segments of the university community.

A second element of the revised interpretive frame employed by the university opposition was the invocation of specific individuals and events that further contextualized university
autonomy in modern Venezuelan history. Opponents of the law were quick to draw upon the familial legacies of key university authorities, especially those of Central University rector Cecilia García Arocha and academic vice-rector Nicolás Bianco. Both came from families with important prior involvement in university and educational affairs, endowing them with a certain degree of legitimacy even independently of their elected status.¹²⁸ As noted in Chapter 2, García Arocha’s uncle, Humberto García Arocha, served as Minister of Education during the democratic junta between 1945 and 1946, where he implemented the controversial law that outlined the first principles of the Venezuelan Teaching State and extended more state control over private and religious education. Her father and brother were also important figures in the more recent history of the Central University, both having served as deans in the school of dentistry. García Arocha was able to draw upon this legacy in her 2008 bid for the position of rector, when campaign literature (official and otherwise) described her family as “champions of autonomy” (Tal Cual, 2008).

Academic vice rector Nicolás Bianco held a similar (and arguably even more powerful) claim as part a family that defended university autonomy. As described in Chapter 2, his father, Jesús María Bianco, was rector of the Central University during the Renovation Movement of the 1960s. Rector Bianco’s role in directly confronting President Caldera about the controversial 1970 Universities Law, and his subsequent forced removal from his position allowed Nicolás Bianco to draw upon his father's legacy as an “emblematic figure of university autonomy” (Tal Cual, 2008) when he campaigned for the post. As two of the most vocal figures of the December 2010 protests, the backgrounds of these two executive authorities helped legitimize and contextualize the outrage of the autonomous universities.

¹²⁸ The UCV cuarteta — García Arocha, Bianco, Belmonte and Méndez — was elected with over 75 percent of the vote in the 2008 leadership contest.
The extent to which this interpretive framework facilitated the mobilization of actors within the university community was significant. Humberto García Larralde contextualized this for me:

University autonomy in the UCV above all is almost some sort of a myth […] It’s a very strong symbol. And the fact is, the autonomous universities have always been very independent and rebellious in front of different governments. And that's appreciated as a value. The capacity of the university to obey its own reasons, to be critical, of course based on research, on debate, on university activities, on academic reasons — that's prized as a very positive value. So when the government tries to, in a very direct way, control and eliminate diversity, to eliminate pluralism, to control the university through the budget, to restrict and restrain the academic activities, that's very strongly felt. So in those terms, you have a very — I wouldn't call it a uniform reaction, but a common reaction by the deans and the professors who are not representatives of government (personal interview, 2012).

Almost every single person with whom I spoke regarding the 2009 and 2010-11 legislative conflicts shared García Larralde’s sentiments. The spectre of incursions on university autonomy — not just procedurally, but symbolically too — stimulated a “common reaction” that united various parts of the university community and enhanced their desire to engage in the protests that followed. In this sense, the university opposition successfully managed to portray itself as part of el pueblo, not in the same class-based sense as in the government's populist discourse, but instead as a community of Venezuelans concerned with the integrity and longevity of these historical national institutions.

The Protests

Increased intra- and interuniversity connectives structures and more resonant interpretive frames produced significant organizational cohesion in the oppositional university sector, resulting in a situation where the universities were in a much better position to sustain protest than they were in 2009. Two incidents capture this interaction well. The first occurred a day after the law was passed, on December 24, 2010. That Christmas Eve, the parish at the Central University hosted a mass led by Jesuit priest and Andrés Bello Catholic University rector José
Virtuoso. Masses are a regular part of the UCV holiday calendar despite its status as a secular institution, but this event was exceptional because it was administered in explicit defence of university autonomy. Virtuoso, a Jesuit priest with a doctorate in history, was named UCAB rector six months earlier. That December night he sermonized to congregants that “we are willing to give our lives for dignity. We will defend autonomy with our lives if necessary” (El Universal, 24 December 2010). Situating the current crisis in a longer view of national history, he went on to say that since independence the university’s youth have engaged in the struggle for liberty and democracy in times of dictatorship, and that the task before the university community at that juncture was to stay united as one body in order to ensure that the focus remained the same for all. “We want to improve the university community,” he impassioned, “but we want to do it democratically, in freedom” (El Universal, 24 December 2010).

Virtuoso’s homily was remarkable for several reasons. First, although he briefly taught at the Central University in 2007, he was not one of its academic, administrative or religious authorities. The university autonomy frame was so powerful, however, that it could effectively be used by a relative outsider, someone without a direct personal or professional stake in the autonomy of Venezuelan universities. His leadership and participation in conducting this religious ceremony at a public, secular institution other than his own illustrates the further deactivation of institutional boundaries between public and private universities in service of unified resistance. Second, the forcefulness of his words is striking. Virtuoso cast the struggle in literal and liturgical terms of life and death, making it clear that university autonomy was a principle worth fighting for no matter the cost. Here, he signalled an alliance, a unity that transcended autonomous, experimental and private institutional boundaries by appealing to the university’s mission to culturally, academically and socially improve society. In this, he
mimicked the discursive style that marked the “grand cosmic themes” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 65) of the Bolivarian government known to use the phrase “socialism or death.” The Christmas Eve mass therefore strengthened the legitimacy of the universities’ struggle against the law (and the government) by infusing it with the kind of gravitas that would not otherwise be present in a secular policy struggle between state and university. Virtuoso’s presence and his position as a scholar of history, an authority of a prestigious private university, and as a Jesuit priest, brought considerable moral authority to the mobilization against the law.\textsuperscript{129}

The second incident demonstrating the organizational and symbolic strength of the oppositional university community occurred only several days later. On December 27, 2010, rector García Arocha announced that on New Year’s Eve all Venezuelans were invited to gather at the Rectorate to ring in the new year with a “hug of peace.” On the day of December 31 students from the Central University, Simón Bolivar University, Andrés Bello Catholic University and the Metropolitan University presented Venezuelan Vice President Elías Jaua with a petition — the fourth that week — asking the president to reconsider the legislation. UCV Secretary Amalio Belmonte addressed the public shortly thereafter, saying that

\begin{quote}
our students, as part of their legacy and rightful inheritance, joined forces with professors to activate a vast movement of those custodians of history and guarantors of the future, in order to tell the country that the UCV will never be an institution of captive minds. For this reason the Christmas celebration and our hope for the new year are filled with struggles for freedom and autonomy (Lugo, 2011).
\end{quote}

Later that evening, a reported several hundred people representing various universities and members of the sympathetic public descended upon the campus to show their support for the

\textsuperscript{129} Virtuoso was not the only important religious figure during this period. Luis Ugalde, the rector of the Andrés Bello Catholic University from 1990 to 2010, also participated in the protests. That Ugalde’s baptism into political activism occurred when as a young student he helped oust Marcos Pérez Jiménez from power in 1958 further contributed to the legitimacy of the protests by locating the 2010 protests in a longer historical narrative of students rising to challenge autocrats.
national universities, their opposition to the University Education Law, and their belief in the principle of university autonomy (Lugo, 2011). Standing arm in arm underneath the iconic Clock Tower, rector García Arocha, secretary Belmonte, president of the UCV Professors’ Union Victor Márquez, and FCU president Diego Scharifker addressed the crowd, saying that Venezuelans wanted a democratic country and that they would not permit further “persecution” by the national government. After counting down to the stroke of midnight, these leaders embraced, joined the crowd in singing the national anthem, and ushered in a new year dedicated to the uncompromising preservation of university autonomy.

Father Virtuoso’s Christmas mass and the New Year’s celebration at the Central University were powerful signals to the Chávez government that despite the Assembly’s approval of the Law of University Education, a large portion of the country’s university system was not prepared to accept it as legitimate, much less abide by the changes it required. The eleven-day delay between when the law was approved by the legislature and when Chávez finally addressed the controversy in public provided the universities with an opportunity to foment considerable resistance that let the president know what he could expect should he sign it into law. The strength and spectacle of this brief period of protest in late December and early January was a clear sign to the president that the University Education Law was an enormous political risk.

Declining State Cohesion (or, the Role of Political Opportunity)

The intensive mobilization of the oppositional universities was not, of course, any guarantee that the government would reconsider or retreat. Had the government been certain of its ability to withstand such protest, it would likely have proceeded apace irrespective of any outrage from the university sector. In this case, however, the organizational capacity of the universities was augmented by the declining capacity of the educational bureaucracy. Tensions between key
actors in the executive branch and a pattern of ill-timed ministerial turnover sapped the state’s strength in the higher education arena, which created a more favourable political opportunity structure for the universities to press forward with their claims. This is not to say that the oppositional university sector gained strength because of internal weakness within the state; the universities’ increased organizational capacity was largely irrespective of the goings on within the Ministry (and arguably despite the Ministry’s best efforts). However, internal state weakness increased the universities’ leverage as Bolivarian elites tried to calculate precisely how much risk they would expose themselves to if Chávez signed the legislation.

There were three major indicators of state weakness in late 2010, at least relative to its previous strength. The first is that there was significant change in the leadership structure within the educational ministries in the months leading up to the bill’s public unveiling (refer to Table 3.2 in the previous chapter). In February 2010 Luis Acuña was replaced by Edgardo Ramírez, a professor of International Studies at the Central University of Venezuela and former director of the Office of International Cooperation within the Ministry of Higher Education. Ramírez, considered to be on the more radical side of chavismo, was the primary figure responsible for finishing the draft and shepherding the bill to the legislature for approval. His appointment as Minister also corresponded with the further concentration of power in the executive in March 2010, when he replaced three-year veteran Antonio Castejón as Director of the Office of University Sector Planning. Additionally, Héctor Navarro was replaced as Minister of Education six months before the law was introduced. His successor, Jennifer Gil Laya, was a journalist with a background in other ministries but without experience in the education sector. The design of the University Education Law therefore happened after the replacement of two important and well-trained cabinet members, one of whom, in the case of the Education portfolio, lacked any
relevant experience in educational policy or administration. The appointment of two new ministers only months before the introduction of a major piece of legislation was a very risky move for Chávez and indicated declining ministerial cohesion.

The reasons for the leadership changes within the ministries are unclear, although there did not seem to be particular acrimony given that both Acuña and Navarro continued to hold important positions in the government. Both men also continued to exercise significant influence on President Chávez in matters of higher education, a fact demonstrated by the second indicator of weaker state cohesion: lack of support from important actors outside the Bolivarian government. According to several sources either directly involved in protesting the law or who had close connections to the president, Acuña and Navarro informed Chávez in a private letter that they had significant reservations about the feasibility of implementing a number of key changes stipulated in the bill, and that they cautioned him not to proceed with it. Although none of those interviewed actually saw the letter — “it was private!” one person reminded me admonishingly when I asked if he knew the contents — three interview sources independently alleged that the letter was a major reason for the president’s refusal to sign the law. The claim also seems to be corroborated by the references to discussions with members of the government who warned him that the law was “inapplicable” in Chávez’s televised veto address.

The reservations of former top educational policymakers were accompanied by similar concerns expressed by authorities at a number of Venezuela’s experimental universities. Acuña and Navarro were far from the only signatories of the letter in question; rectors (presumably some if not all of whom were members of the Bolivarian Rectors’ Association) and vice-rectors at a number of the most explicitly pro-government experimental universities in Venezuela were also said to have cosigned the letter out of concern about the feasibility of the University
Education Law. A particular sticking point for university authorities was apparently the intention to eliminate deans from the administrative and organizational structure. Such a move would shift a tremendous amount of additional administrative and academic responsibility onto the rectors and would, in the view of these alleged signatories, lead to ungovernability within the universities. That the state-appointed authorities of these experimental universities were willing to put themselves at professional risk by signing a letter critical of the law, even if the communication was not a public document, indicates the extent of internal opposition to the legislation and a marked lack of consensus within those universities most affiliated with the state. Even when there was ideological agreement about the general goals of university transformation, the people who would ultimately be tasked with implementing the new features required of the law did not think it was prudent or even necessarily possible to do. This lack of confidence surely had an effect on the president’s understanding of its viability despite the Ministry’s commitment to making it law.

A final contributing factor to the state’s inability to adopt, let alone implement, the University Education Law, was its ineffective attempt at creating a gripping interpretive frame. The state’s attempt to redefine university autonomy as connected to the larger project of ‘university transformation’ was unconvincing to those who did not already support the reforms. This new, weakly articulated version of university autonomy could not compete with the centuries old principle as traditionally defined by the right of universities to govern themselves, even as the Bolivarian state tried to evoke its namesake, Simón Bolívar, the independence hero who first granted university autonomy to Venezuelan higher education institutions. The government could not sufficiently differentiate its new, Bolivarian version of university autonomy, which as described above had much less to do with the power to make decisions free
of external interference and much more to do with transformative political change, from the traditional principle characteristic of the historical state-university relationship. Even Minister Ramírez’s attempts to shore up support for the Bolivarian formulation of ‘autonomy,’ including references to the necessity of purging the “mafias” controlling the autonomous universities, were futile (NoticieroDigital, 24 December 2010). The state's university transformation frame was just not as convincing as the interpretive defense advanced by the autonomous and oppositional universities.

It is, of course, impossible to know for certain why President Chávez declined to sign the University Education Law. If ever it were to be done, that was the time; those were the last days of the MVR’s supermajority, and an incoming crop of opposition deputies with experience in university politics would ensure greater resistance should an amended higher education bill be reintroduced. One possible explanation is that, as first outlined in relation to the 2009 Organic Education Law, several prominent student leaders formerly affiliated with the 2007 student mobilizations, most notably Stalin González and Ricardo Sanchez, were “absorbed into opposition political parties” (Brading, 2013, p. 115) and elected as novice legislators in the 2010 election. The participation of new deputies with backgrounds in the student movement increased the likelihood that concerns about university autonomy would continue into the new legislative term even though the PSUV retained a majority in the National Assembly.

The most plausible explanation for the reversal, however, is the combination of internal opposition within the MVR/PSUV and the outpouring of direct action that spilled forth from the universities when the legislation was proposed and approved by deputies. Even Chávez’s shrewdest critics acknowledged during interviews that the president was able to make such astute

\[^{130}\text{It is also possible, perhaps even likely, that Chávez had already been diagnosed with the cancer that eventually killed him, for in June 2011 he announced that he was recovering from surgery to remove a malignant tumour.}\]
political calculations. Leonardo Carvajal, one of the most ardent supporters of the 2002 coup attempt, conceded that “Hugo Chávez is a political radical, but at the same time, he’s really smart. He’s clever. And he’s had so much time in power that he’s been able to see what’s going on. He figured out that in this law, which his own people created and passed, that there were lines which could be used as a boomerang and could come back [to be used against him]” (personal interview 2012). Chávez appeared uncertain of his government’s ability to withstand the protests and to successfully implement the University Education Law.

The Aftermath

In the days after the veto, both sides of the conflict claimed victory. The oppositional universities celebrated the president’s decision as a momentous triumph for democracy and the integrity of the Venezuelan university. Although many remained skeptical and cautioned that the move was “just another strategy to manipulate public opinion and show the world and the people of Venezuela a democratic facade,” various organizations credited their own “seriousness and strength” in the “victorious battle” and promised never to “relent in our efforts to help restore the rule of law in this country” (Flores, 2011). Central University rector Cecilia García Arocha declared that “we, the free, pluralistic, democratic and autonomous universities were right: the University Education Law violated Article 109 of the Constitution. This was a triumph of truth and of the effort of united universities to demand that the president of Venezuela listen to us” (El Universal, 6 January 2011).

For many chavistas, initial surprise and confusion about why the president would make such a decision slowly led to acceptance. Echoing Chávez’s own comments, supporters of the government (including former minister Navarro) pointed to the veto as proof that participatory democracy and the separation of powers were alive and well. One of the pro-government
members of the University Council at an autonomous university described his own thought process this way: “When I saw the president vetoing the law I didn’t understand why. But after thinking about it, I realized he was right. We’re not prepared for so much participation and so many changes inside the university” (Alfonso, personal interview, 2012). The president of the Federation of Student Centres at the Eastern University, the only autonomous university to have pro-Chávez students in top leadership positions, similarly argued that “the decision cannot be regarded as a political defeat, but as a correction” and that the veto showed that “we live in a real, participatory, social democracy” (Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, 4 January 2011).

Hanging onto the president’s promise to reopen debate about a new university law in the coming period, the bill’s supporters tried to mitigate their disappointment by looking to the future.

The promise of future reform, however, did not materialize. Ministers Ramirez and Gil were swiftly replaced by Yadira Córdova (until then the rector of the Bolivarian University) and Maryanne Hanson (formerly of the Ministry of Science and Technology), both of whom were widely regarded as much less combative than previous ministers. The forty-year-old Universities Law, outdated as it was, remained the primary legislative basis for the organization and governance of the university system, and the university opposition moved from the streets back into their houses of study. This is not to say that tensions dissipated; electoral suspensions continued into 2012 and conflict over budgetary matters reached still new heights. The 2010 University Education Law, however, was decidedly put to rest.

**State Power and Social Protest in Venezuelan Higher Education Legislation**

When Hugo Chávez died in 2013, the higher education arena was governed by a legal patchwork constituted by the 1970 Universities Law, the 1999 Constitution, and the 2009 Organic Education Law. This arrangement produced internal inconsistency and led to a legal
quagmire, for it allowed the state and the oppositional universities to grasp at some statutes to support their positions while simultaneously claiming that other provisions were being violated by their antagonists. The primary approach taken by the Professors’ Association at the Central University in response to the Organic Education Law, for example, was that it violated both the Constitution and the 1970 Universities Law even though the definitions of autonomy differed between them. Likewise, the state argued that the universities’ refusal to ensure electoral parity violated the Organic Law and the Constitution despite the administrative autonomy granted to them in the Universities Law.

This jumbled governance framework was the direct consequence of the state’s inability to design, adopt and implement a complementary suite of laws specific to the education sector. Of the three brought to the National Assembly — the 2001 Organic Education Law, the 2009 Organic Education Law, and the 2010 University Education Law — only the 2009 proposal was adopted, and even then, it was not implemented as desired by the state. The result was a situation where, in the words of Benjamin Scharifker, “the development of universities has stopped. We cannot evolve according to the times because we cannot have legitimate authorities in the universities. That has been the outcome of the law. […] It has been detaining the growth of universities for the last three years already” (Scharifker, personal interview, 2012a). In this interpretation, in other words, not only did the government’s attempt to bring the university system into the twenty-first century fail, but it also imprisoned the university sector in a context of complete institutional stasis.

This stalemate, enormously frustrating to the reformers and universities alike, was ultimately produced by variability in the balance of power between the Venezuelan state and the university sector. In each case at hand, shifts in the balance of institutional autonomy and capacity
conditioned the final outcome. In 2001 the distribution of autonomy between reformers and social forces required a certain amount of consensus in the design process, which was achieved by the development of effective connections between civil society organizations and federal legislators. The proposal that emerged was ultimately unpalatable to a ministry that was very internally cohesive and sought more radical reform. Using his presidential prerogative, Chávez dismissed the bill.

In 2009 the institutional context was significantly different. The state had more autonomy and capacity relative to the university sector, due largely to continued cohesion and centralization of power within the Ministries of Education and Higher Education. This allowed reformers to be very selective about consultation during the design process and resulted in a proposal that the oppositional universities rejected. The universities, at that point unaccustomed to direct political engagement of the sort required of them to resist the law, were unable to generate enough organizational cohesion or symbolic capital to mount an effective challenge. Organizational flaws that carried over from the 2007 student protests and a cleavage between professors and students precluded intensive student engagement, while protesting universities also had to compete with political parties and the extra-parliamentary opposition, including non-educational civil society actors concerned with a wide range of non-university concerns.

This asymmetrical distribution of capacity, augmented by the supermajority held by the MVR in the National Assembly, contributed to the government's ability to adopt the law. However, it did not assist the state in the implementation stage. The public nature of this reform, both in terms of its legislative character and the fact that it applied to national public institutions, meant that the social reaction was particularly strong, a significant contrast to the ease with which reformers moved through the implementation stage during the universalization reforms.
The oppositional universities, united as a cohesive bloc, drew on their formal and *de facto* institutional autonomy to ignore the provisions of what they considered to be an illegitimate and unfair law. The executive authorities and University Councils stated their intentions to proceed apace with their own internal electoral processes, a belligerent decision that triggered a further reaction from the judicial arm of the state, which subsequently further restricted university autonomy by suspending the electoral processes altogether.

When the 2010 Universities Law was introduced, then, the autonomous universities as a class of institutions were in a much weaker position in terms of the balance of formal and empirical institutional autonomy *vis-à-vis* the state. Yet the decline of university autonomy as a result of the Organic Law and its fallout did not render them powerless. Far from it. The organizational capacity generated in 2009 was not just remobilized but enhanced, allowing swift and effective coordination. Students had a much greater role than in 2009, working closely with authorities and professors and bringing an essential militancy to the resistance activities, particularly in terms of how to frame the conflict in a way that evoked key symbols of Venezuelan nationalism and that resituated members of the university opposition within the very *pueblo* at the core of Chávez's populist rhetoric. Conversely, the extensive cross-sectoral alliances between the universities and party and media organizations that were so active in opposing the Organic Education Law were nearly absent. There was more organizational cooperation within the university sector, but fewer connections between the universities and non-university actors, making the universities’ claims on the state sharper and more concentrated. This organizational cohesion and singular focus allowed the university opposition to sustain outrage and resistance, especially non-institutional forms of protest, over the holiday break. Although the National Assembly therefore achieved its objective during the adoption process, Chávez evidently
recognized the potential cost of his signature and declined to make the bill law. Ministerial turnover, cleavages within the pro-government educational sector and the loss of the government’s supermajority in the National Assembly combined with the force generated by the university sector and compelled the president to back down.

If institutional autonomy is a decisive factor in the balance of power between the state and social forces, as the state-in-society paradigm and much of the literature in comparative higher education generally hold, its increasing accumulation by the state and at the expense of the autonomous universities should have worked to the advantage of the former. However, the above cases demonstrate that variation in autonomy alone cannot account for the different outcomes, and that it must be considered in relation to capacity. Nowhere is this clearer than in direct comparison of the 2009 Organic Law and the 2010 Universities Law. In the latter case, the loss of university autonomy correlated to an increase in the universities’ ability to push back against the state, or, to put it differently, a decrease in the state’s ability to withstand the sorts of direct challenges that occurred during the protests between December 21, 2010, and January 4, 2011. At the same time, the formal institutional autonomy of the universities enabled them to refuse to implement the controversial provisions of the 2009 Organic Education Law, a stage when capacity is often thought to be the most critical resource. In each of the three cases, then, and at different stages in the reform process, the particular distributions of autonomy and capacity interacted to shape the strategic interactions of those for and against reform.

When taken together the three cases illustrate a broader point about how higher education reform both illustrated and constituted the concentration of power in the executive branch, specifically in the office of the chief executive. The ways in which educational reform were attempted and sometimes achieved funneled more power to the executive, which in turn enabled
additional reforms that led to the further concentration of state power. The institutionalization of the Teaching State and the transformation of membership in the university community from an academic right to a political right are but two instances of this process. At the same time, the three cases highlight the enduring weakness of the Venezuelan state. Unlike the universalization achievements described in the previous chapter, which presented an image of the state as a tremendously powerful servant of Venezuela’s uneducated poor, the attempts at legislative reform revealed the state’s deep limitations. Its relative autonomy could only take it so far: when confronted with an organizationally cohesive and politically engaged opposition, even one that operated outside of the party system, the Chávez government was forced to recognize that which it could not conquer. It did not have the capacity to transform the legal framework of the university education system as it so desired.
Conclusion

Making Sense of Limited Reform

Hugo Chávez’s death from cancer in March of 2013 was not unexpected, but it was shocking. Three years after his demise, Chávez remains a controversial figure among scholars, policymakers, and the Venezuelan public. For critics, his legacy remains one of protracted economic difficulty, hollowed representative institutions, and social unrest. In January 2015, for example, Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñan despaired that “it is difficult to see how Venezuela can recover democracy” (p. 117) under Chávez’s successor, Nicolás Maduro. Within Venezuela, it is not uncommon to happen across beheaded statues and defaced murals of the former president, reminders that this “dead communist dictator” (Roberts, 2015), as progressive American presidential candidate Bernie Sanders called him, remains for parts of the population as reviled in death as he was in life. His supporters, on the other hand, are as effusive as ever, praising him for his commitment to social justice and willingness to speak truth to power no matter who he upset. Perhaps nowhere is this ongoing adoration more directly expressed than in a new version of the Lord’s Prayer written by a past winner of Venezuela’s National Literature Prize:

Our Chávez, who art in heaven and earth,
In the sea and within us,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy legacy come to guide the people within these lands and afar.
Give us your light to guide us every day,
Do not let us fall to the temptation of capitalism,
Deliver us from the evils of the oligarchy, like the crime of contraband,
Because from all of us comes our homeland, peace, and life.
Forever and ever, amen.
Viva Chávez.
(Bercovitch, 2015)
In the hagiographies and the condemnations alike, observers often present the Chávez era (1999-2013) as exceptional, and Chávez himself as a leader unlike any Venezuela had ever seen. There is no disputing that in many ways Chávez engineered a break with the past, transforming representative political institutions and the distribution of national wealth in an attempt to redeem the Venezuelan state as one worthy of *el pueblo*. In 2008 Fernando Coronil reflected on the state during this period as “perhaps the most magical of all,” and Chávez as “the most magical of our presidents” (p. 5), a figure who made a decisive break with the Punto Fijo system and yet who, much like several of his presidential predecessors, was “endowed with the power to replace reality with fabulous fictions propped up by oil wealth” (1997, p. 2).

This reliance on oil wealth, however, ultimately underscores how Chávez’s legacy sits well within national traditions of strong presidential power, rentier populism, and political polarization. Like presidents Juan Vicente Gómez, Marcos Pérez Jiménez, and Carlos Andrés Pérez, Chávez relied upon what in Venezuela is infamously known as the “devil’s excrement” (Karl, 1997, p. 4) — petroleum — to convince Venezuelans, and perhaps himself too, that the Venezuelan state (at least beyond the executive branch) had a greater ability to affect major social transformation than it actually did. The grandeur of spectacle was at least partially compensatory, camouflage for a state that was becoming progressively more vulnerable due to the decline of international oil prices, extensive political polarization, and the centralization of power in the office of the president. Bolivarian state and government elites changed much in Venezuela, but they did not — could not — completely transform the country in a way that lived up to the dreams of twenty-first century socialism.

My dissertation addresses this fundamental struggle for power between the Venezuelan state and oppositional social forces in the context of higher education reform between 1999 and 2012,
and explains why the state was not able to achieve several significant policy objectives even though the political odds seemed to favour such change. As described in the Introduction and again at the end of Chapter 1, I advanced two central expectations about why the adoption and implementation of higher education reforms between 1999 and 2012 was so limited. First, I expected to find that the state was able to successfully implement reforms only when its institutional autonomy and capacity were not matched or exceeded by the autonomy and capacity of oppositional actors within the university sector. Second, I expected to find that the ways in which autonomy and capacity interacted varied according to the stage of the reform process (agenda-setting, design, adoption, and implementation) and the type of reform (bureaucratic or legislative). With respect to bureaucratic initiatives, I expected to find that Bolivarian reformers were primarily enabled by state autonomy during the agenda-setting, design, and adoption stages, and that capacity became the critical resource during implementation. In the case of legislative reform, however, I expected to find that although state autonomy remained important during the agenda-setting and design stages, the distribution of organizational capacity vis-à-vis the state and oppositional universities was far more consequential during the adoption stage (and that it remained important, though not singularly so, during implementation).

The findings of this dissertation broadly confirm these expectations. The outcomes of the four higher education reform initiatives considered here — the universalization of the higher education system, the 2001 Organic Education Law, the 2009 Organic Education Law, and the 2010 University Education Law — were primarily determined by the balance of power between the Venezuelan state and the oppositional university sector. Reformers' uneven policy success reflected gaps between state autonomy and capacity at different stages of the reform process, which in turn varied according to whether the initiative was bureaucratic or legislative in nature.
In the case of bureaucratic universalization reforms considered in Chapter 3, including the creation of Mission Sucre, Mission Alma Mater, and the regional experimental universities (discussed here as collectively constitutive of the 'municipalization' reform plan intended to make higher education more accessible across the Venezuelan territory and to historically excluded groups), the state's relative autonomy from oppositional actors was critical during the agenda-setting, design, and adoption stages of reform. The autonomy of state elites from social forces between 1999 and 2002 allowed a cohesive group of reformers significant latitude during the design process, which resulted in the articulation of the municipalization strategy that guided reforms for the duration of Chávez’s time in office. Beginning in 2005 and continuing to the end of Chávez's time in office, subsequent bureaucratic reforms truncated the power of the National Universities Council and of the Office of University Sector Planning (OPSU), the technical body responsible for the coordination of the higher education system, further increasing the autonomy of the state relative to the public universities. Without the institutional power to constrain the state's autonomy in these areas, the oppositional university sector had no recourse other than to state their objections.

This progressive concentration of autonomy in the state enabled Bolivarian reformers to go ahead with the implementation of the universalization reforms without encountering any real resistance. The autonomy that allowed the executive branch to use discretionary funds controlled by the office of the president and to employ alternative distributive strategies such as the use of additional credits was possible because of the tremendous oil wealth collected after 2003, which significantly enhanced the material capacity of the central state and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (and, later, the Ministry of Higher Education). The plentiful material resources available to reformers facilitated the costly universalization reforms that simply could not have
been so extensively implemented in a more austere context. This case of bureaucratic reform therefore demonstrates how autonomy and capacity were self-reinforcing, but at different stages of the reform process. Institutional autonomy mattered most during the agenda-setting, design, and adoption of the universalization reforms, and material capacity was the major source of power during the implementation process. By employing these strategies of reform within the institutional context, Bolivarian elites improved the accessibility of higher education in Venezuela while simultaneously investing the state with more power relative to the higher education system as a whole (and the autonomous universities in particular).

The state's relative autonomy from social forces and its organizational and symbolic capacity conditioned the strategic decisions of the state and oppositional universities very differently in the cases of legislative reform explored in Chapter 4, which compared the 2001 Organic Education Law, the 2009 Organic Education Law, and the 2010 University Education Law. The legislative proposals initiated by Bolivarian reformers were much more publicly visible and had more direct and immediate implications for the public universities themselves. As a result, distributions of autonomy and capacity influenced the strategic interactions of reform advocates and opponents at various stages of the legislative reform processes differently than in the universalization case. Whereas state autonomy was essential during the agenda-setting and design stages of reform, as it was for the universalization reform, the distribution of organizational and symbolic capacity between the state and university sector became much more important during the adoption stage.

Thus, in 2001, social forces autonomous from the government exerted enough influence on the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) to collaborate on a draft Organic Education Law, but President Chávez, irritated by its provisions and invested with considerable authority by the 1999
constitution, ensured that it was removed from the legislative agenda. Eight years later, increasing state autonomy allowed policymakers to design (and the National Assembly to approve) another Organic Education Law, followed by the 2010 University Education Law a year later. Chávez approved the 2009 bill but “vetoed” the 2010 legislation, a difference that can be attributed to the growing organizational and symbolic capacities of the oppositional university sector. The increasing intra- and interorganizational cohesion of the university opposition between 2009 and 2010 occurred alongside the declining cohesion of the Venezuelan state and Bolivarian government. During this period the ability of the autonomous universities to frame their objections to the legislation similarly increased, while the state remained incapable of developing a particularly resonant interpretive framework. As a result, several weeks after the introduction of the 2010 University Education Law, the university opposition was able to muster enough organizational and symbolic capacity to force the government to withdraw the bill. The concentration of autonomy in the executive branch may have given reformers the confidence to proceed with the controversial proposal, but once Chávez realized that the state did not have the capacity to successfully implement many of its wide-ranging provisions and that the protests showed no signs of fading away, he opted to set it aside for further consideration.

Even the 2009 Organic Education Law, however, cannot be considered an unmitigated policy success. Although this bill was the only piece of legislation to become law, the de facto autonomy of the public autonomous universities ultimately undermined the capacity of state reformers to successfully apply new policies to the hostile "trenches" (Migdal, 2001) of the university system. A combination of the universities’ formal autonomy and organizational cohesion allowed them to resist the directive to change their electoral regulations, and despite the penalties imposed by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, the universities did not acquiesce. Formal
university autonomy was therefore an absolutely critical resource for these public universities to be able to withstand further state interventions in their internal affairs. Sufficient autonomy can allow oppositional forces to successfully resist, at least for a period, even a relatively capable state. While the resulting stasis can hardly be considered a victory for the universities, neither is it constitutive of utter defeat.

In summarizing the complex interactions of autonomy and capacity in these episodes of reform, I am not arguing that autonomy or capacity were singularly important at particular stages of the reform process. For example, my emphasis on the capacity of the oppositional university sector to mobilize against the adoption of the 2010 University Education Law does not mean that the distribution of autonomy did not have an influence. Rather, depending on the institutional and organizational context, the two source of power interacted in ways that differently shaped actors' strategic choices as they agitated for and against policy change. The fact of this complexity is precisely why reform is best understood relationally and sequentially.

**Implications for Scholarship on State-Society Relations in Venezuela**

In the context of Venezuelan state-society relations, the cases addressed in this dissertation make two central contributions regarding the ostensible strength of the Venezuelan state and the alleged weakness of the Venezuelan opposition. First, my findings significantly challenge common characterizations of the Venezuelan state as uniformly strong and of the Chávez government as capable of steamrolling over the opposition to accomplish whatever it wanted. Instead, this analysis illustrates how Venezuela exhibited what Kohli (1994) describes as a “simultaneous tendency toward centralization and powerlessness” (p. 89). On the one hand, the progressive centralization and concentration of autonomy and capacity in the office of the president and the Fifth Republic Movement/United Socialist Party of Venezuela conferred more
power in the executive branch and, in particular, President Chávez himself. For example, the bureaucratic reconcentration of power by way of the reforms to the National Universities Council and the Office of University Sector Planning are evidence of a determined effort to reduce the autonomy of important technical and governance institutions formerly largely independent of the state. Similarly, the spread of municipalization programs and experimental (non-autonomous) universities across the national territory indicates a certain spatial deconcentration of higher education programs but a concomitant recentralization of power in the central state. These findings therefore support the notion that Venezuela is a case where power was successfully recentralized at the expense not only of subnational governments, as Eaton (2013) argues, but of social institutions as well.

At the same time, even as the president accumulated more power relative to the social forces considered here, higher education reform was undermined by a strong countercurrent of powerlessness, “the repeated incapacity of rulers to fulfill their stated objectives” (Kohli, 1994, p. 98). While considerable material wealth was sufficient to create many more institutions and higher education programs, the legislative efforts at reform required contending with a variety of obstacles that the state and government in some ways brought on themselves. The personalization of power, for example, weakened the capacity of the Ministry of University Education to develop a law that even Chávez’s own allies in the experimental universities could support, leading to a critical lack of chavista confidence in the 2010 University Education Law.

At an even more fundamental level, these reforms were stymied by the very nature of mutual state-university interdependence. To resort to the exercise of despotic power, the "range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups" (Mann, 1984, p. 188), had the potential to be incredibly
counterproductive. However much Bolivarian elites wanted to increase state power relative to the autonomous universities, they did not truly want (nor could they afford) to completely eliminate these important national institutions, institutions upon which the state depended to replenish its infrastructural and symbolic power. Thus, whereas Chávez clamped down hard on other institutions or organizations he perceived to be threatening or contrary to the Bolivarian political project, such as media organizations and subnational oppositional actors, reaching too far had the potential to be enormously costly not only for the project of twenty-first century socialism but for the Venezuelan nation-state too; despite the turmoil, the autonomous universities remained the largest and best public institutions devoted to the education of the industrial and professional sectors upon which the state so depended. This situation is reminiscent of Thomas Hobbes' (1990 [1651]) observation regarding the English Civil War that “the core of the rebellion, as you have seen by this, and read of other rebellions, are the Universities, which nevertheless are not to be cast away, but to be better disciplined” (p. 58). Bolivarian elites could and did discipline the universities, but not eliminate them entirely.

If my findings challenge overstatements of state strength, so too do they contradict prevalent characterizations of the opposition as totally impotent, especially after 2007. This is at least in part because I conceive of ‘the opposition’ as more than that which was only party-based or driven by private economic interests. I do not wish to present a revisionist history that minimizes the deinstitutionalization of the party system in the years leading up to Chávez’s election or the repeated blunders of opposition elites (party or otherwise) after he took office. Both were rather stunning. My dissertation shows that whether of necessity or ingenuity (or both), members of the Venezuelan university community essentially became a form of extra-parliamentary social opposition, resorting to institutions and organizations other than political parties when they felt
compelled to challenge the Venezuelan state and government. Students, professors, university authorities, and alumni used the tools and mechanisms available them to confront and resist what they perceived to be the excessive use of political power in the affairs of Venezuelan universities. Existing connective structures — primarily related to academic governance, but still bearing the imprint of puntofijista corporatism — allowed professors and students in particular to mobilize against the government in lieu of doing so through weak parties. Especially given the long tradition of autonomous universities in rising to simultaneously greet and confront the state (Wojnarowicz, 1991), it made great sense to use the organizational resources of the universities to engage in political combat. The findings presented here therefore demand a more nuanced understanding of what 'opposition' looked like in Venezuela, and challenge accounts of the organized opposition as extremist, anti-democratic, and even seditious.

While the opposition to the educational reforms studied here led to a certain amount of success in terms of blocking key reform efforts, my findings also indicate that there is a story to be told about the failure of the university administrations themselves to use these episodes of contention as opportunities to initiate much-needed intrainstitutional reform. The various proposals drafted by oppositional forces — particularly the so-called UCAB and UCV drafts of higher education laws considered in Chapter 4 — were ambitious documents that had little potential to be taken seriously by a government intent on a very different reform trajectory. However, there were few reasons why the autonomous universities could not have adopted the important provisions within those documents regardless of what happened in the legislative realm. Several people who spoke with me about the state of Venezuelan higher education remarked that they wished the authorities of the autonomous universities had proceeded with a comparable process of internal reform in order to renovate highly bureaucratized and outdated
institutions. The suspensions imposed by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice could have incited a process of internal electoral renewal, for example, even if it did not end in a way acceptable to the state. Instead, the authorities defended the governing reglamentos and structure of power, doubling down on the existing distribution of power in the name of defending the principles of administrative and organizational university autonomy. The university opposition, and especially the student movement, may have made use of open political opportunity structures to challenge the government in the legislative arena, but they did not make use of their existing organizational and administrative power to exploit parallel opportunities for internal institutional renewal.

Particularly now that Hugo Chávez is no longer in power, questions about the extent to which the state’s accomplishments (especially the costly municipalization reforms) will be an “enduring legacy” (Tinker Salas, 2009) are especially pressing. Examinations about the long-term quality and effectiveness of these initiatives, especially in terms of whether they contributed to the development of twenty-first century socialism and the transformation of Venezuelan society, are better left to scholars of curriculum, teaching, and learning. In the context of public policy and state-university relations, however, it is possible to make some modest predictions. For example, while the intentionally non-institutional nature of the Bolivarian Missions initially allowed the state significant flexibility in the design and implementation of these popular programs, in a context of falling international oil prices, soaring inflation, and growing national debt, this very deftness may well have sabotaged their long-term durability. Barring a major economic turnaround, the cost of making these programs so dependent upon discretionary income controlled by the executive branch may be that the Bolivarian Missions and University Villages will be replaced or simply fade into obscurity in a post-chavismo era, particularly if
Bolivarian elites are forced to choose between financing these programs or maintaining a base level of funding for the national universities upon which they still depend.

In the realm of legislation, it is highly unlikely that Bolivarian reformers will push forward with a transformative agenda quite so aggressively (or even at all) after the historic December 2015 legislative election that gave the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) coalition a supermajority in the National Assembly and significantly reduced the power of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. It is true that Bolivarian elites retain control of the judicial and executive branches, areas where the state has generally been more successful at adopting and implementing higher education reforms. It is also the case that President Nicolás Maduro (elected in April 2013) has the autonomy and capacity to veto any bills proposed by the MUD, and could make use of his existing decree powers to initiate reform on his own. However, would-be Bolivarian higher education reformers face a significant disincentive with respect to introducing new legislation. Not only can the MUD now set the legislative agenda, but there is also a significant student activist presence in its grassroots base and its current parliamentary composition. The induction of students into political mobilization beginning with the protests surrounding the RCTV closure and the constitutional referendum in 2007 primed many student activists for further political engagement in the formal institutional sphere, and contributed to the gradual recomposition of party-based opposition to chavismo.

Nowhere is the impact of the student movement on party politics better illustrated than in the results of the December 2015 election. Stalin González, the Central University student union

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131 Under the leadership of President Maduro, the state-university relationship continues to deteriorate as reformers continue to expand the scope of state power relative to the autonomous universities. For example, in December 2014 the Office of University Sector Planning Office created a new System of University Admission that gave the state more control over admissions requirements to the autonomous universities (Pérez Hernáiz, 2015; Pérez Hernáiz and Smilde, 2015). The extent of the state’s fiduciary duty to the public universities also remains a major source of conflict, and has led to indefinite faculty strike (beginning in September 2015 and still ongoing as of December 2015) in over ten public universities.
president during the 2009 Organic Education Law controversy, was re-elected to serve as the Un Nuevo Tiempo representative for the Capital District, a post he initially won in September 2010. To the west, voters in Táchira state elected Juan Requesens (Primero Justicia), another former president of the Central University student union, and Gaby Arellano (Voluntad Popular), a former student union president of the University of the Andes. These young Venezuelans, and others like them, remain a source of vibrant and committed power, new participants in the enduring historical tradition of student leaders and activists moving from university politics to the national (and institutional) political stage. The student mobilization considered in this dissertation is therefore likely to be the preface to a much greater story about the revival of the post-Chávez Venezuelan opposition.

**Implications for Comparative Research on the Study of the Politics of Higher Education**

Beyond the national Venezuelan context, my findings have significant theoretical and empirical lessons for the study of higher education politics in the fields of comparative political science and comparative higher education. For political scientists, my analysis reveals the essential importance of studying the university as a substantial political actor in matters of state-society relations. The university can no longer be treated secondarily to student movements or only as an engine of economic growth. The relational and procedural focus I advance in this dissertation provides a conceptual framework that understands universities (particularly public universities) as internally complex and fundamentally political formal institutions that are profoundly embedded in mutually transformative dynamics with states. On this basis alone they are worth of far more attention than they have been given to date. As institutions that often have some degree of formal autonomy but which frequently depend upon the state for the majority of their material resources, research into the politics of higher education reform illustrate the liminal
character of the university and by extension the shifting nature of the state-society boundary. Research into the politics of higher education reform and the university as a discrete political institution reveals as much about the state as it does about the university, and more broadly, about how states and social forces navigate relationships of power in different historical and institutional contexts.

My emphasis on process and the relational interaction of institutions also yields new insights about the outcomes of particular reform initiatives, not just broad dynamics of state-society relations. By exploring the policymaking process sequentially, I show that it is possible to learn more about how autonomy and capacity interact at different stages of reform, and about how changing opportunities and constraints inform the strategic choices of relevant actors at each step. This is true not only of the decisions made by reformers, a common focus of public policy literature, but by social organizations as well. As I demonstrate in the preceding chapters, the ways in which opponents of reform choose to mobilize against particular initiatives are dependent upon the type of reform (in this study, legislative or bureaucratic) and the changing balance of power between reform-mongers and opponents that results from ongoing strategic engagement. Scholarship that considers how actors interact at each distinct stage of different kinds of reform leads to a more sophisticated understanding of policy change than that which glosses over these important institutional, organizational, and mobilizational differences.

Beyond political science, this dissertation also illustrates how explicitly situating higher education reform within the context of state-society relations can conceptually enrich the field of comparative higher education. The outcomes of domestic reform initiatives are conditioned by factors including legacies of state strength or weakness, social and organizational cleavages and alliances, patterns of mobilization, and other structural and institutional variables not often
addressed in educational policy research or the growing literature on internationalization. More specifically, this research also urges educational scholars to reconsider the role not only of state capacity relative to universities, but also of institutional capacity within the universities themselves. Existing research that overwhelmingly privileges university autonomy can be strengthened by considering how the organizational, material, and symbolic dimensions of capacity interact with autonomy at various stages of the reform process, and how these distributions of power condition actors’ decisions about designing, adoption, and implementing initiatives. Rather than discussing institutional capacity only in the context of strategic planning and university administration, as does much of the literature on “capacity building,” it must also be understood as an important source of institutional power in and of itself.

Despite its benefits, this conceptual approach to the politics of higher education has some limits. In areas where university autonomy is limited or proscribed, this framework may not be particularly fruitful. Basing analysis of higher education reform on the presumption that there is a certain minimum distribution of institutional power becomes less compelling in cases where university autonomy is strictly limited or proscribed. For example, the general lack of de jure or de facto university autonomy in East Asian universities, a legacy of a distinct Confucian model of higher education, may render this approach inappropriate (Anderson and Johnson, 1998). Likewise, in contexts where post-secondary education systems consist primarily of non-university institutions like vocational colleges or technical institutes, which generally lack not only autonomy but also the same cultural and institutional salience as universities, an alternative approach to the study of higher education reform may be required.

For much of the Global South in particular, however, the benefits of this approach outweigh the drawbacks. The theoretical and conceptual considerations proposed here present a variety of
opportunities for comparative empirical research. For example, scholars interested in historical questions of state formation and consolidation may go beyond the oft-studied focus on basic schooling to consider how universities have been both generators and manifestations of infrastructural power, shaping the dispersion of state authority and legitimacy over national territories by educating professional, bureaucratic, and political classes. Further comparative research on the emergence of universities during colonization, their relationships with religious and secular authorities, and their role (or lack thereof) in political independence movements can contribute to greater understanding of the historical origins of contemporary state and social power not only in Latin America but in other colonial contexts such as the British Raj, Sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of the Middle East.

Understanding these historical legacies can (and should) also inform comparative research into higher education reform in more contemporary situations, especially in relatively weak states where small shifts in the balance of power between states and social forces can have significant impact on institutional development and patterns of accommodation. Elsewhere in Latin America, as reformers attempt to implement various legislative or bureaucratic policies that reduce the fiduciary burden on central states, university communities in places like Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, México and Perú have resisted the adoption and implementation of reform initiatives with varying degrees of success, sometimes protesting to no immediately visible effect but other times forcing governments to remove proposals from the political agenda altogether (Gómez and Ordorika, 2012; Lloyd, 2010; Salinas and Fraser, 2012; Semana, 2011). Across the Atlantic, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the future direction of reform is also a matter of considerable contention. In a region where higher education systems generally emerged only after mid-twentieth century independence, public higher education remains a scarce but highly in demand
good, and despite some successes with massification programs, most states in the region lack the capacity to implement and sustain quality higher education infrastructure (Teferra and Altbach, 2004). Decisions around partnerships with multilateral lending agencies and foreign governments, the allocation and distribution of funds, the creation of incentives for private universities and colleges, and the status of autonomy itself are significant issues on the current political agenda of many state and government elites, as most recently illustrated in the South African Fees Must Fall protests (Dell, 2015; Wangenge-Ouma, 2012). In these cases especially, where higher education systems are so weakly institutionalized but where reform is increasingly prioritized on national agendas, it is important not to reduce universities to little more than engines of economic growth, and to instead recognize them as consequential political actors.

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I began this dissertation with an anecdote that introduced some of the complexity inherent in the study of the politics of higher education. I end it in a similar spirit. On my last day of fieldwork in Venezuela, I took a final walk around the campus of the Central University of Venezuela, an institution frequently described as the “crown jewel” of the nation and a campus designated a World Heritage Site because of its modernist architectural detail. Today the campus occupies two square kilometres in the heart of Caracas, and in many ways functions as a civic space unto itself, one that highlights its complexity as a liminal institution in Venezuelan state-society relations. Officially called the “Ciudad Universitaria” (“University City”), it is bounded by the public Botanical Gardens to its immediate north (and Mount Avila further north still), highways to the north and east, and middle class commercial and residential developments

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132 Planning for the campus began in 1942 when President Isaías Medina Angarita (1941-1945) commissioned a professor from the Faculty of Architecture, Carlos Raúl Villanueva, to build a modern campus that would replace its existing home in the former Santa María seminary (today’s Plaza Bolívar). Construction began in 1945 and continued for two decades, although the new campus became operational in 1953.
to the south. Although there are gates at each of the three main entrances, there are no security checkpoints (unlike at many of the private universities I visited, including the Andrés Bello Catholic University and the Metropolitan University, where students, faculty, and staff are required to show identification). The campus is directly accessible by the public metro station and is surrounded by mototaxi and metrobus stands that connect to the university’s internal avenues which lead to a hospital, volunteer fire department, security service, pharmacy, medicinal garden, cafeteria, concert hall, Olympic swimming pool and stadium, a civic infrastructure that is not limited to members of the university community but which serves Caracas citizens in general. It is also full of art, including installations, sculptures, statues and murals spread across the campus, and has a sound system that on that day was quietly piping Lana Del Ray and other American pop music across the walkways near the main library.

What drew my attention as I left the campus for the final time was not the art, the music, or the architecture, but two large signs that I had seen many times before on my way to and from various research appointments. The first, painted on a large piece of brown butcher’s paper in black, blue, and red, and affixed to the side of a building near the Tres Gracias entrance of the campus, read “Neither in the hands of the ‘academic’ aristocracy nor in the hands of the National Government! For the radical democratization of the university in service of workers and the poor!” The second, taped to a large building that houses the Faculties of Humanities, Political Science, and Law, had a similar message: “Enough with the dictatorship of stratification! We fight for universal suffrage! For everyone to have the right to vote and be elected! Organization and mobilization from below!” (see Figures 4 and 5).

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133 According to the 1970 Universities Law the campus has an extraterritorial status that forbids agents of the state from entering university grounds unless explicitly invited by university authorities. This inviolability invests the UCV with a further degree of autonomy from the Venezuelan state.
Posted by the League of Socialist Workers, an organization not formally based inside the UCV, these signs encapsulated so much of the relationship between the Venezuelan state and the public university system during the administration of former president Hugo Chávez: the
incredible ideological and partisan diversity (and polarization) of Venezuelan society, the role of the autonomous university as a particular site of contention, the deep embeddedness of these transformative public institutions in Venezuelan society, and, of course, the inherently political nature of higher education itself. As deeply political institutions, Venezuela's public universities have always had to negotiate with state power, periodically rebuffing the state even while depending on it. In a post-Chávez era, the politics of Venezuelan higher education reform may become less openly contentious, but they are unlikely to be especially harmonious.
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